

DEMOCRATIZING OR  
RECONFIGURING  
PREDATORY  
AUTOCRACY?



MYTHS AND REALITIES IN  
AFRICA TODAY



Tatah Mentan

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Democratizing or Reconfiguring Predatory Autocracy? Myths and  
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# Democratizing or Reconfiguring Predatory Autocracy?

## Myths and Realities in Africa Today

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Tatah Mentan



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## **Dedication**

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**To those who lost life and limb  
for the democratization  
of Africa**



## **Preface**

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***“How fortunate for governments that the people they administer don’t think” – Adolf Hitler.***

Despite the explosion of multi-party elections since the 1990s democratic development and political stability have proved elusive in Africa. The greatest defect of African multiparty elections is that they address the symptoms of the African predicament rather than its structural causes in terms of explaining the structural roots of the crisis of politics, power, and production. If Africa is to get out of its present quagmire, it must proceed along the path of empowering the people, their organizations, and communities. At present, the electoral democratization of Africa has focused on the power elite, who are the natural enemies of democracy. Although the elite have provided the vast majority of the leaders of the electoral democracy movement, their involvement in democracy movements is mainly a tactical manoeuvre to reconfigure their predatory autocracy. My invaluable thanks go to Dr. Godwin Moye Bongyu of Dschang University for his editorial hygiene.

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**Theodore Lentz Peace Fellow**  
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**University of Minnesota, USA, 2009**



The debate about the scope and the promise of capitalist democracy (liberal democracy) has been reignited by the African experience of democratization in the 1990s. This could hardly be more welcome in a continent where the authoritarian imprint of capitalism has very deep roots and where bourgeois revolutions are an exception. The authoritarian features of African societies can be traced back to both their colonial heritage and to their dependent and reactionary mode of capitalist development, by and large based upon agrarianism and the servitude and not, as in the United States, on the impulses stemming from a myriad of free farmers (Boron, 1989).

Little wonder that if in her almost five decades of independent political life Africa did not have a single capitalist revolution culminating in the implantation of a democratic regime – neither Nigeria in 1960, nor Senegal in 1960, nor Cote D'Ivoire in 1960, nor Guinea in 1958, let alone Ghana in 1957 – concluded their “unresolved question” by establishing a democratic regime. These independence “revolutions” had as their overriding concern making room for the development of capitalism, not the construction of a democratic order.

Yet, despite the legacy of its traumatic history, in the early 1990s Africa seemed ready to try democracy again. This trend was reinforced by the world-wide democratic thrust that started to gain momentum in an unprecedented manner. Impressed by these events, Samuel P. Huntington argued that the world was surfing on a “third democratic wave” (Huntington, 1991). Others, like Francis Fukuyama, saw in these developments the clear signs of a victorious capitalism that, hand in hand with a no less triumphant liberal democracy, was heralding the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992).

In the face of this supposedly definitive victory and the unchallenged hegemony of neoliberalism, including the resounding failure of really existing socialisms and the inability of social democracy to transcend capitalism- a significant section of the left has accepted a mistaken conception of democracy that rests on

two premises. On the one hand, the supposedly linear and irreversible nature of democratic progress; on the other hand, the belief, both historically false and theoretically wrong, that democracy is a project that is coterminous with the mere establishment of adequate representative and governmental institutions.

The heroic enterprise of creating a democratic state is reduced to the establishment of a system of rules and procedures unrelated to the ethical and social context proper to democracy and indifferent to the implications that deep seated social contradictions and class inequalities have for the political process. Thus (mis) understood, democracy was completely “depoliticized”, becoming a set of abstract rules and procedures that only pose technical problems.

It is rather puzzling that democracy, being such a simple and reasonable political program, has been able to arouse throughout history fierce passions and dogged resistance, bringing about revolutions and counter-revolutions, bloody civil wars, protracted popular struggles and brutal repressions of all sorts in Africa in the 1990s and in the twenty-first century. Was all this drama – the drama of the West since the time of Pericles – just the results of a simple drama *malentendu*? Wouldn't it be more reasonable to think instead that the implantation of democracy reflects a peculiar outcome of class conflicts, something that goes beyond an innocent procedural instance, how could we possibly account for the fact that it was much easier to abolish slavery – and the empire that rested on slave labour – than to democratize underdeveloped African capitalism?

A substantive caveat is in order here before we continue our discussion. Throughout this note I shall use the expression democratic capitalism instead of the more common capitalist (liberal) democracy. The reason briefly speaking is quite straightforward: the latter expression conveys the wrong idea – but a rather apologetic one – that in this type of political regime the capitalist side of it is just an adjective that barely qualifies the workings of a full-blown democracy. On the contrary, democratic capitalism captures the real essence of these regimes by pointing out that the democratic features of it are, for all its importance, hardly anything more than political modifiers of the underlying undemocratic structure of a capitalist society (Boron, 1995b: 189-220; Wood, 1995: 204-237).

The belated triumph of Schumpeterian ideas, which downsize the democratic promise to its formalistic and procedural arrangements, mirrors the narrow scope and limits of democratic capitalism (early noticed by Marx in *The Jewish Question* and other essays) by ignoring both the ethical content of democracy – as a crucial constituent society – as well as the practical-historical processes constituting real existing democracies. It is of crucial importance to realize that Schumpeter-inspired procedural theories of democracy imply a radical departure from Aristotle to Marx and Tocqueville's introductory chapter to his famous *Democracy in America*, for instance, portrays the epic nature of democratization with these moving words:

- This whole book has been written under the impulse of a kind religious dread
- inspired by the contemplation of this irresistible revolution advancing century
- by century over every obstacle and even now going forward amid the ruins
- it has itself created.

(Tocqueville, 1969: 12).

Despite the compelling force of Tocqueville's historical fresco mainstream political science still looks upon democracy from an incredibly narrow perspective, considering it as a method solely aimed at the formation of a government and no longer as a condition of civil society. Instead, the critical and substantive approach nurtured in the Marxist tradition considers democracy as a unique amalgam binding together three inseparable components:

- (a) first, democracy requires a social formation in which a given level – historically variable, of course – of material welfare and fundamental equality have been achieved, thus allowing for full development of unique individuals and a plurality of expressions of social life;
- (b) democracy implies the effective enjoyment of freedom by the citizenry, a freedom that has to be not only a formal entitlement but a living and practical day-to-day

experience rooted in the main features of a given society. However, while necessary, these two social conditions are not sufficient to produce by themselves a democratic state. Other, not necessarily democratic outcomes would be conceivable as well. So, a third condition has to be met;

- (c) the existence of a complex set of unambiguous institutions and rules of the game able to guarantee the relatively uncertain outcomes that characterize democratic states (Przeworski, 1985: pp. 138-145). This is the politico-institutional condition of democracy, a necessary one indeed; but not a sufficient one, because democracy is devalued as a political regime when it is embedded in a type of society, like capitalism, characterized by structures, institutions and ideologies antagonistic and/ or hostile to its spirit.

A critical theoretical approach, therefore, would argue that a full-fledged democracy only exists when all these three conditions are met. As Adam Przeworski has observed, “(t)o discuss democracy without considering the economy in which this democracy is to function is an operation worthy of an ostrich” (Przeworski, 1990:p. 102). In practical terms democratic capitalisms, even the most developed ones, barely meet these standards: the institutional deficits of advanced democracies are very well known; and even more serious doubts are raised when minimum levels of social and economic equality are considered, or when the effective enjoyment of freedoms – distributed extremely unevenly among the different sections of the populations – is taken into account (O'Donnell, 1994).



## Chapter Two

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### Democracy: Why Myths and Realities in Africa?

There is a foggy zone in what is called democracy in Africa today. Most regimes today are neither clearly democratic nor fully authoritarian. They inhabit the wide and foggy zone between liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism. To order this universe of ambiguous regimes some authors have been working with broad intermediate categories like “democratizing regime” or “semidemocracy.” Others have been developing lists of more specific “diminished subtypes” such as “illiberal” or “delegative” democracy.

Here, I propose to fill the conceptual space between the opposite poles of liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism with two symmetrical categories: electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism. The resulting fourfold typology captures significant variation in the broad area between the poles without abandoning the idea that a meaningful distinction may be drawn between democratic and authoritarian regimes.

The distinction between liberal and electoral democracies derives from the common idea that elections are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for modern democracy. Such a regime cannot exist without elections, but elections alone are not enough. While liberal democracies go beyond the electoral minimum, electoral democracies do not. They manage to “get elections right” but fail to institutionalize other vital dimensions of democratic constitutionalism, such as the rule of law, political accountability, bureaucratic integrity, and public deliberation.

The distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism builds upon the common affirmation that democracy requires elections, but not just any kind of elections. The idea of democratic self-government is incompatible with electoral farces. In the common phrasing, elections must be “free and fair” in order to pass as democratic. Under electoral democracy, contests comply with minimal democratic norms; under electoral authoritarianism, they do not.

At present, most authoritarian regimes hold some sort of elections. But not all such contests are created equal. It is the nature of these contests that divides electoral authoritarianism from closed authoritarianism. Some are shams that nobody can take seriously; others are occasions of struggle that nobody can ignore. Moreover, as soon as elections cross a hard-to-specify but real threshold of openness and competitiveness, they tend to take on a life of their own. The threshold may be ill defined and its exact position may vary over time and across cases. But once a regime moves beyond it, elections stop being shams and start playing “enough of a role in the constitution of power” to compel both rulers and opposition forces “genuinely to care” about them.

Examples are worth presenting here. According to the Nigerian *Vanguard* of November 17, 2005, controversy over the third term proposed for President Olusegun Obasanjo contained in the draft Constitution prepared by the National Assembly Constitution Review Committee deepened when a critic of the proposal was removed from the committee. Senator Ahmed Aruwa (ANPP, Kaduna) who had criticised the National Assembly as bending towards the inclinations of the presidency was removed from the Committee on account of allegations of absenteeism levelled by his colleagues from Kaduna State. In Gambia, former army lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, who came to power in a bloodless military coup in July 1994 and twice led his party to election victories in 1996/97 and 2001/2002, intends to run for a third five-year term in the 2006 elections. In Togo, late Gnassingbe Eyadema’s presidency was simply inherited by his son, Faure Eyadema in February 2004. The Nwai Kibakis and Robert Mugabes simply refuse to quit when they lose elections. These trends speak volumes about electoral democracy and its future in Africa.

In Africa today the issue of democratic government has surged into full public view. The reason is simple. Africa has stumbled into the new millennium with a profound sense of hopes being frustrated, of stereotypes being reaffirmed. In other words, the most common stereotypes of Africa is that of besieged democratic governance, of constitutional governance being undermined, of the rule of law being flagrantly disregarded, and of leaders looting the public treasury with impunity. Enormous constraints on civil and political

liberties persist, forcing people to move from polling stations to violence after elections (Snyder, 2000).

In part, the demand for greater openness and accountability is buttressed by a new awareness of the linkages between economic development and democratic practices in Africa. But, why is personalized rule – the fact that public policy-making lacks the logic and empirical content that typically characterizes such an activity in other contexts, but also that governance structures are largely informal and subject to arbitrary change – still predominant in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa? Why is there so much continuing economic hardship, the limited impact of the external diffusion effect, and the ruling elite's organizational advantages and superior access to political and economic resources? Why have Africans become increasingly dependent on their 'exit option': their ability to vote with their feet to escape political control? Why have African democratic regimes fostered blind compliance and a lack of concern for a strong civic public realm by curbing any independent political activity outside an institutional network controlled by a ruling party-state? Why is it that from Nigeria to Senegal and from Namibia to Cairo most rulers have only gone as far with political reforms as they have felt they have needed to in order to satisfy domestic and donor pressures (Tripp, 2004: 3-26)? Finally, why is there publicly defended or virtual complicity in the systematic retrogression of African countries into an 'Orwellian-style', totalitarian states?

For many observers, the 1980s had been considered "The Lost Decade" for Africa (Elliott, 2003). Many of the continent's economies suffered under the multiple legacies of economic mismanagement, political corruption, predatory autocracy, and deep social malaise. The confluence of a radically changing global environment and the profound crises of African political economy created new opportunities for change. A segment of the international community, headed by Western governments and multilateral financial institutions, identified misguided state-directed economic policies and bad governance by African regimes as the root cause of economic and social crises. By the end of the 1980s, Western nations (Shivji, 2003) were not only insisting on economic policy reform but were also demanding the establishment of good governance as a condition for further economic assistance to Africa (Campbell, 1991).

Simultaneously, civil society, which had been rendered virtually extinct by nearly three decades of autocratic domination, re-emerged with vigour and vitality. African associational life assumed dynamic qualities involving the (re)emergence of a wide variety of populist, professional, and political movements that gave expression to long suppressed democratic aspirations. By the late 1980s civic associations had begun to mobilize around political issues. These groups were now demanding not only a return to democratic pluralism, but also social justice and guarantees of human and civil rights.

Affected by pressures emanating from both within and outside their societies, autocratic regimes in Africa began to yield to the democratic impulses of society by the early 1990s. By that time, all but a handful of authoritarian regimes on the continent had embarked on political liberalization programs leaning towards multiparty democracy. However, as the decade came to an end, political liberalization automatically resulted in the forced establishment and consolidation of multipartyism. Indeed, there was significant backsliding in which older authoritarian practices were being concealed behind a newer multiparty “democratic” façade. In its place, there is a slavish adherence to democratic forms without its substance.

The situation of liberal democracy and human rights in Africa is now at a critical juncture. At the very moment when the international community should be stepping up its support for democratic forces in Africa, providing the necessary moral, political, and economic impetus for fundamental change, there is a danger that donor fatigue and changing world economic and military priorities may lead to a lessening of such support. What is more troubling than apparent donor fatigue is the tendency in the international community to virtually ignore the repressive tendencies of those they regard as the *new African leaders*. For instance, According to *The Monitor* of Kampala of March 15, 2006, during the Ugandan Presidential election, “people... were stopped from voting in areas where (the opposition) was believed to have considerable support; simply cancelled out some of the people in the areas where (the opposition) had support either by keeping them away from the polling station or by telling them they had already voted...”, stealing...” up to 500,000 other votes by buying voters’ cards from (opposition)

supporters, especially in Eastern Uganda, or voting for them and telling them that they had already voted when they turned up” and casting.” votes... for Museveni at ghost polling stations that existed only on paper.” The international community seems satisfied now to settle for political stability in Africa rather than to insist on democracy and human rights for all.

This work has therefore three purposes:

- a) To critically assess the progress that has been made in Africa over the past decade toward promoting the emergence and consolidation of democracy and the protection of human rights of all citizens.
- b) To identify projects committed to promoting democracy and human rights as well as initiating innovative approaches that would enable these interests to make further gains. It must be acknowledged that despite the invaluable support of external actors, the drive for democracy and human rights is, for the most part, a result of concerted action on the part of African citizens themselves. However, external supporters have usurped the political space that African peoples are opening for themselves to express their own views and aspirations for change through ideologies like neoliberalism.
- c) To make recommendations on how the future African democracy movements can best promote the democracy and human rights aspirations of African peoples.

Following these purposes, the argument of this book therefore is that not all African leaders are really concerned with democratic governance; some are pointedly focused on rapaciousness and survival strategies. African political elites tend to function under rules of contestation and participation that can be characterized as rather loose institutional arrangements. In such circumstances, the rules may be elaborately enshrined in both constitution and law. But, they are not followed by the ruling autocrats nor are they institutionalized. Rather, rules depend instead upon the exigencies of the given moment for convenient interpretation or ignoring. For

example, on December 2, 2005, residents of the Gabonese capital, Libreville, awoke to a city teeming with security forces, one day after police clashed with crowds protesting the election that put Africa's longest-serving leader, Omar Bongo Ondimba, in power for another seven years. The poll was marked by numerous irregularities, opposition leaders said, such as "Ballot-stuffing, multiple votes including the names of deceased people, influence peddling, vote buying, and outsiders posing as Gabonese to cast a ballot."

Indeed, the common orientation that imbues political elites in African countries is the notion of 'end justifies means'—and, perhaps, the most common indicator of this is the massive cries and instances of rigged elections. The other result of loose institutional arrangements is usually widespread and pervasive corruption from the highest to the lowest levels of society. This is partly because political leaders use weak bureaucracies as instruments of personal power, partly to serve corrupt ends and partly to exercise vigorous authority in pursuit of a secret personal agenda. Loose institutional arrangements also contribute to entrenched systematized corruption because the inertia and weakness of the bureaucracy spawn informal and widely valued ways around the 'problem'. In fact, the premise of "There is no law" is that Courts are often more influenced by power, politics, and money than they are by a plain reading of the law. Indeed, corruption is chronic. For Africa to make steady progress towards greater democracy and better governance, authoritarianism and centralist control, political intolerance and retribution, patronage, cronyism, nepotism, and corruption must be combated by an empowered civil society.

## Chapter Three

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### Why is Democracy a Contested Global Construct Today?

I shall start by insisting that education for democracy requires dialogical, authentic learning rather than the commodification of uniform, standardized knowledge and its acquisition touted by those marketizing education primarily for economic purposes. With this observation in mind, I shall call upon educators and university scholars to resist the identification of learning with text scores, and to defend the traditional role of learning in the human emancipation of citizens whose knowledge and life lessons learned in school contribute to their wise governance of themselves.

Let us examine the question of what comes after deceitful neoliberalism by reiterating the connection between neoliberalism and neoconservativism, on the one hand, and the antiglobalization and antiwar movements, on the other – the contested meaning of democracy in the contemporary world system today. Everyone speaking for public attribution in the post-Cold War era seems to favour democracy. For the global institutions, the preferred term is, however, “good governance,” and for the Bush Administration, it is “liberty.” The problematic relationship between these terms and what movement activists have in mind by democracy gets to the heart of the conflict over what type of world is possible.

To the International Monetary Fund and the leadership of the World Trade Organization, following the rules, treating all participants fairly, and maintaining a level playing field in an open world economy are the keys to prosperity and achieving the aspirations of people everywhere. Accountability and transparency are the tropes of good governance. The presumption is that, such procedural justice in defence of individual equality in formal dealings, and respect for the liberty of free choice, foster the general well being. Searching for convincing reasons to invade Iraq, in the face of overwhelming international resistance to the U.S. plan, President Bush identified the democratization of that country as a prime war aim. This focused attention on Saddam Hussein’s abysmal

human rights record and the need for regime change in order to create a functioning democracy worthy of American ideals in that country.

Both of these formulations endorsing democracy prove problematic. In the case of the global economic governance institutions, the stumbling block is the disparate power among participants. The United States calls the tune at the IMF and the WTO, and the only real impediments to its designs come from the handful of other significant players. Most of the countries of the world play little role in the decisions which are life and death matters for their people. In many cases, the governments themselves are so undemocratic that the people of the nations have little or no say as to what their own governments say and do. The United States and the European powers have been responsible for installing and perpetuating the rule of most of the local elites.

Any real discussion of democracy needs to be extended beyond the undemocratic nature of the global economic institutions to a larger discussion of democracy, one that goes beyond whether votes are counted fairly, opposition candidates allowed to participate on an equal basis, and the voices of ordinary people heard by their elected leaders. Democracy needs finally to be discussed in relation to class rule in capitalist societies.

In the case of the Bush Doctrine, the pretence of democracy as defined by the White House is very tenuous. When the parliament of Turkey votes to deny the United States what it wants, it is told to vote again or its wishes will simply be ignored. When the UN Security Council appears to reject what the United States wants, it is told it can retain its credibility by doing America's bidding or become irrelevant. Along with judicious bribes and threats, votes go more along lines suggested by Washington, but the limits of such unilateralism are looming large.

Despite the costs of standing up to the dictatorship of the United States, more and more people and governments are increasingly willing to do so. This is partly because of Mr. Bush's evangelical and cowboy style, but it is more fundamentally because of the consequences for the world of the U.S. turn to unilateralism with its obvious destabilizing and dictatorial aspects.



It is increasingly clear that much of the talk about democracy is really about the imposition of the will of a most dangerous set of policy makers who have usurped power in the United States. Their position has shaken other conservatives and neoliberal institutionalists. They have also strengthened, deepened, and broadened the array of anti-systemic forces active in movements of global civil society.

Democracy, we must understand, has less to do with elections than with the broader social relations which structure what is politically possible. Democracy can be measured in other terms: the extent of the people's active participation in decision making; the degree to which they are adequately informed; who controls the media; how are campaigns financed; and who is able realistically to run for office. This requires an analysis at the level of class structures of contemporary capitalism, including the limits these structures impose on democracy.

The global justice movement has been right to focus on the pain inflicted around the world by the IMF and the World Bank, the collectors of debt incurred by despots and corrupt elites but paid in the life blood of ordinary people. The suffering inflicted by military violence in the name of promoting freedom and democracy, and the pain resulting from the allocation of scarce resources to war instead of meeting human need, are not choices made by the people. Nor did U.S. citizens vote to withdraw from the arms limitation treaty, to oppose the International Criminal Court or the Kyoto Protocol to slow down global warming.

The social democratic compromise of the postwar years has been replaced by a virulent, grasping form of rule which is moving to outlaw the possibility of protest and democratic expression. The consequences of neoliberalism have forced a frightened awareness of what is at stake, and in many places have inspired the development of a counter-hegemonic consciousness and a renewed mobilization of people. It is in their understanding of the central importance of a broader definition of democracy that the antiglobalization and antiwar movements represent a dramatic challenge to class rule and current American Bonapartism.



## Chapter Four

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### Analytical Framework

We will primarily survey the contested centre of the continuum, the boundary between electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism. It starts from the assumption that a coherent set of minimal democratic norms exists that any democratic regime must fulfil. In principle, a regime leaves democratic ground the moment it violates at least one of the constitutive norms that make elections democratic. At the outset, though, let us avoid illusions of precision. The idea of a logical set of democratic norms circumscribes the core issues that must be addressed by anyone who wishes to set electoral democracies apart from electoral autocracies. But where empirical reality is fuzzy, no amount of conceptual sophistication will allow us to draw clear and consensual lines between regime types. On the contrary, regime boundaries tend to be blurry and controversial to the extent that their constitutive norms are idealizations that admit varying degrees of realization in actual political practice.

Democratic norms are not *perfectly* realized anywhere, even in advanced democracies. Access to the electoral arena always has a cost and is never perfectly equal; the scopes and jurisdictions of elective offices are everywhere limited; electoral institutions invariably discriminate against somebody inside or outside the party system; and democratic politics is never quite sovereign but always subject to societal as well as constitutional constraints.

Moreover, the distinction between obeying and transgressing democratic norms is imprecise. There is much room for nuance and ambivalence. In politics as in other types of competitive activities, bending and circumventing the rules may sometimes be considered “part of the game.” Anyone familiar with the often-messy business of monitoring elections knows that vote fraud can be a very complicated, shadowy, and slippery affair that causes domestic and international observers to pull their hair out by the handful. Much practical knowledge and painstaking methodological analysis have gone toward devising methods that allow monitors to distinguish

massive fraud from widespread but unsystematic irregularities, but the results so far are hardly conclusive.

As a consequence, the dual challenge of defining reasonable normative and empirical thresholds is often a matter of context-sensitive judgment rather than precise measurement. Difficult cases will continue to stir up controversy. Still, the existence of foggy zones does not mean that no meaningful distinctions can be drawn between electoral democracies and electoral autocracies.

How does one best account for the “paradox of plenty”? Why are the African countries blessed by nature cursed by humans? The most common explanatory framework offered until recently has been connected with the “Dutch disease” phenomenon. This originates from the struggle of consecutive Dutch governments in coping with abundant natural gas-based revenues emerging in the early 1960s. The result was a lapse in fiscal discipline and a strong appreciation of the exchange rate leading to reduced competitiveness in other parts of the economy. A negative spiral of economic deterioration followed as debt problems constrained future-oriented investments in human and physical capital.

While still relevant, accounting for the misery of newly resource-rich developing and transition economies requires a search beyond purely economic explanations. This is particularly salient for countries with a political and social-economic fabric as rudimentary as we see in much of Africa. In sum, these variables will indicate whether a country has a tendency towards predatory or developmental features, based on two, contradictory hypotheses – “greedlock” vs. benevolent resource state. Our intention here is not to pinpoint the state of affairs at a particular point in time, but to study the direction of change.

### ***Predatory or benevolent resource-states?***

The absence of functioning democratic institutions to check executive powers, bureaucracies permeated by corruption, weak civil societies oppressed by autocratic leaders and a closely-knit political, economic and military elite, all point towards the formation of a predatory state. Such a state is not inclined to ensure long-term investments in education and health services for the broader population. The fundamental relationship between state and society

becomes limited to handing out money, whenever needed to enlist electoral support, and repressing dissent. This may take the form of (a) legislative and other steps to increase the ruling party's representation in parliament and undermine the electoral basis of the opposition (b) the establishment of effective control over the army and police force, civil service, etc.; and (c) the implementation of the basic discriminatory laws so as to fragment the population and make ethnic or crony clique the dominant national group in a multi-national country.

Indeed, no analytical framework should be deterministic. It *is* possible to foresee a transformation towards a benevolent resource-rich state. Growing resource revenues *can* facilitate positive change by "greasing" political and economic reform processes. New sources of political mobilisation *may* appear, reinforced by, for instance, international NGO alliances and the Internet. International companies and multilateral financial institutions – both alone but more promisingly by working in tandem, *could* exert effective pressure on political regimes seemingly immune towards conditionality.

The morale and performance of civil servants remain very low, and corruption is endemic. Civil society is weak, with local NGO legitimacy hampered by dependence on foreign donors. The ground is thus prepared for unchecked execution of presidential powers in political, economic and military terms. Hence, resource revenues trickle away to the privileged few, with little or no benefit to the broader population.

### ***Corruption***

Another important determinant of "growth" that is correlated with resource endowment, is *corruption* – the misuse of public office or public responsibility for private (personal or sectional) gain. Corruption is often found to depend on natural resource abundance, government policies and the concentration of bureaucratic power. Capital intensive natural resources come out as an important determinant of corruption. Corruption has major damaging effects on economic activity. Arbitrariness and corruption among government officials is often a major hindrance to growth and non-resource investments. Tax collection rates and the management of public expenditure may also be seriously affected by corruption, with far-reaching social and economic consequences.

Both natural resource abundance and trade regulations give rise to corruption. They both stimulate rent-seeking behaviour which is an important determinant for a country's level of corruption. Hence, corruption is determined within the economic system as a consequence of the interaction of economic interests and the use of policy instruments. Both theoretical and empirical work confirm these linkages and further validate the causal relationship between corruption and low economic growth (Leite and Weidemann, 1999).

### ***Searching for explanation***

In sum, empirical findings suggest a strong correlation between a rich endowment of natural resources on the one hand and economic failure, corruption and conflict on the other. The challenge is how to account for this seeming paradox – why are the countries blessed by nature cursed by humans? A common explanation for the economic deterioration that occurs with resource exploitation and exports is the Dutch Disease phenomenon.

Dutch disease is an economic phenomenon in which the discovery and exploitation of natural resources *deindustrializes* a nation's economy. In the given scenario, the value of the country's currency rises (making manufactured goods less competitive), imports increase, non-resource exports decrease. The Dutch Disease – *too much wealth managed unwisely* – becomes an actual disease if there is something special to the activities resource extraction crowds out, such as learning by doing or economies of scale. The phenomenon has been observed in states like Nigeria in the 1960s and 70s, when large reserves of oil were first exploited. Dutch Disease results from an appreciation of the exchange rate, caused by the large inflows of petroleum revenues, which again leads to reduced competitiveness of various non-petroleum sectors of the economy. Dutch Disease will often have particularly serious effects on the poor because traditional sectors such as agriculture and other production in rural areas will lose out to imports that become more competitive as a result of currency appreciation. A further specialisation of the economy on the resource sector and production of non-tradable (sheltered from international competition) occur due to escalation in public spending.

Dutch Disease effects surfaced among capital deficient resource exporters from the late 1970s and in the 1980s. As in the Netherlands lack of fiscal discipline led to accumulated higher external debts with an ensuing debt service ratio which burdened public budgets and reduced opportunities to invest in human and physical capital. The countries were thus caught in a negative spiral of economic deterioration as low saving and lack of private sector investments inhibited a diversified economic growth.

Breaking this circle requires implementation of carefully designed economic policies. Governments need to offset the accelerating – resource related – capital inflows by increasing savings and investments elsewhere in the economy. In order to achieve this goal, the government must move steadily towards a fiscal surplus and promote continued economic diversification. This is generally seen as best achieved in economies exposed to market-based competition. It also requires capabilities of state institutions to design and implement consistent and complex economic policy programs and the strength of politicians to nurture fiscal constraints.

### ***Ideological shifts and new paradigms***

The role of the state in promoting social and economic development has long been a subject of political controversy and academic dispute. In fact, there is hardly any question in the entire development discussion that has been so fiercely debated throughout the second half of the twentieth century. We have no intention of resolving the grand debate. It is worth taking note of, though, how “mainstream” opinion has swung from a predominant state-centred view in the 1960s and 1970s to the liberalism of the 1980s and early 1990s and back again towards a “centrist” position with the current focus on good governance and “enabling environment.”

In economic research natural resources were first seen as critical for development. Eventually the role of physical capital (machinery and equipment) was emphasised followed by a focus on human capital and knowledge and ideas embodied in machinery and equipment. Then for the last 10 to 15 years another shift of attention has occurred with increasing emphasis on the role of policies and the quality of a country's institutions. Social cohesion is also increasingly put forward as a condition for economic growth and development.

In my view, these changes may reflect less real experience in West Africa than underlying ideological shifts in the western world. The challenge is, hence, to develop categories and an analytic approach that is more robust to changes in political fashions. Here is our attempt:

We shall try to capture the essence of state power (in African countries) by focusing attention on two dimensions of paramount importance to any study of development. First comes the level of repression, i.e. the powers available to and employed by the governing in relation to the governed, and, second, the overall purposes for which those powers are used.

### ***Level of repression***

This dimension is often referred to as “autonomy” or level of centralisation. Whatever the terminology, the main point is to what extent the state is under the control of one entity (or whether power is shared) and to what extent the centre of state power also controls the surrounding society. These are closely correlated – the more power is concentrated within the state apparatus, the more likely the entire society is under its control.

In our analytic framework this dimension is made up of four broad variables, as follows: First, the *division of power* within the state itself; to what extent is parliament and the judiciary independent of the executive powers which are normally concentrated in the hands of the president as chief executive? If courts are allowed to function without political interference, a crucial element towards distribution of power has been established. If parliament has real legislative powers and is accountable to the electorate, not to the president, another counterweight to concentration of influence is in place.

Second, the nature of *state bureaucracy*; is it honest and based on merit and achievement or susceptible to undue influence and corruption?

Third, the status of *civil society* in relation to the state; to what extent can mass media and NGOs voice criticism of the institutions and personalities in power? To what extent can meaningful political opposition be organised and power be contested in open and fair elections?



Fourth, the location of the centres of *economic power* in relation to political institutions; to what extent does political and economic leadership overlap? To what extent is economic decision making exposed to rent seeking by political actors? To what degree can political leaders interfere directly or indirectly in the distribution of resources that takes place in the market? This is particularly pertinent to the functioning of state owned financial institutions and parastatal enterprises and to the role of the state as regulator of economic activities (e.g. in granting permits and licences and in collecting taxes, levies and customs).

These four variables are closely intertwined and cannot be understood fully, nor analyzed adequately, one by one. For example: Real distribution of power within the state is impossible without an independent civil society that is strong enough to guarantee transparency in government affairs through a free press and well-organized opposition parties. Such independence hinges, in turn, on the workings of the legal system. Without an independent judiciary, civil society will be in constant jeopardy.

An honest and competent bureaucracy is, likewise, a precondition for a pluralistic civil society and for preventing corruption in the economic sphere. Indeed, the fourth factor above – the relationship between economic and political power – illustrates this interconnectedness better than anything else. If a proper distinction between political and economic power is to be maintained, a society needs both a parliament that can enact the necessary legislation, an open civil society that keeps track of events, an independent judiciary and a competent civil service that enforces the rule of law. And conversely, in the absence of these preconditions, political power can be used at will for personal economic advantage.

### ***Purpose of state power***

While the first dimension captures the basic structure of state power and is intended to answer the question – *who runs the state how?* – the second is focused on the objectives for which the powers of the state are used – *for whom is the state run?* The simplest distinction here is between the few and the many. The resources available to the state can be used for a variety of purposes and in very different ways, depending on the priorities and objectives of the wielders of

power. This is most easily seen in terms of public expenditure, which can be concentrated for the benefit of a minority or dispersed to the advantage of the majority. The best indicator for this dimension is public spending on health and education which is probably the most important and effective way of sharing the resources of the state widely among the population.

If primary health and education is given priority, either over time or relative to comparable countries, one would take it as an indication that the resources of the state in question is used for developmental purposes. If, conversely, these sectors are neglected in relative or absolute terms, there is reason to assume that the state has a predatory character. The term is deliberately used to convey the impression of a state devouring its own resources not for public good, but for private benefit.

Instead of extracting surplus in order to provide collective goods like health, education, physical and legal infrastructure, this type of state produces collective “bads” like corruption, insecurity, disease, and illiteracy because its funds are diverted to other purposes. The predatory state is not necessarily poorer than its developmental counterpart in terms of available resources, but the majority of the population is definitely worse off and the gap between the haves and the have-nots is bound to grow. By combining these two dimensions, we can characterise the nature of the state in the following manner:

### ***Predatory – low level of repression***

The state of type 1 is a traditional autocracy, for example in a feudal society or an agrarian subsistence economy. The level of repression is low and the surplus that can be extracted by the power of the state is severely constrained. Even if distribution of resources is skewed and tends to remain that way, this kind of society can be fairly stable over time due to the underlying, tacit social contract: The rulers do not interfere much in the daily life of their subjects. The latter expect little good from the state, but is not exposed to much bad either.

### ***Predatory – high level of repression***

In the second type, the state is much more powerful and uses its repressive instruments to collect significant resources from society, if necessary by physical means. In this instance, the two dimensions are apt to combine in a particularly malign manner, reinforcing each other in a vicious circle along these lines: Since the state has extensive repressive tools at its disposal, its ability to extract surplus from the population is prevalent everywhere, in taxation, foreign trade, exchange rate regime, regulation of economic activity etc.

The bulk of the resources collected in this manner are controlled by the elite that runs the state, either for personal consumption, for savings abroad or investments in property or even production. Very little “trickles down” to the majority of the population by way of public expenditure. This spending of public funds, instead of redistributing to the lower strata, reinforces the resources available to the elite and makes it possible to extend the powers of the state further. Maintaining a repressive, basically unproductive, apparatus is costly and requires constant access to new resources.

In addition, it is arguable that those who hold power in a predatory state tend to become more and more short-sighted. As the state becomes more oppressive and extractive, the elite gets richer and more powerful, but presumably also more nervous. The more it takes advantage of its position, the more it stands to lose if it were ever to be toppled. Hence, the need to continually strengthen and extend the repressive machinery of the state. The basic motivation in this type of state is power and greed, which is combined in a self-fulfilling way that is very difficult to break. Even if the elite wanted to strike another bargain with the people, it would be very hard to dissolve the old repressive ways without creating chaos. Establishing loyalty as an alternative to repression (Wintrobe, 1998), is extremely difficult in a society characterised by fear and apathy resulting from systematic oppression and class exploitation.

### ***Developmental – low level of repression***

In the third type of state, repression is limited and public funds are used for the benefit of the majority, in particular through health and education. This provides the basis for economic and social development in the long run by raising the level of skills in the

population at large. Over time, education on a broad scale will lead to demands for wider participation in the political system and a wider distribution of the fruits of economic growth.

Hence, this type of state will be inclined to sow the seeds of its own demise. A technocratic elite controls the state from the outset, but invests so much in education that after a generation it can no longer resist the demand for sweeping changes. It follows that this type of state has, presumably, a tendency towards instability as the use of state resources in the long run is likely to undermine even the relatively mild level of repression. This could, in turn, either lead to democratisation, as witnessed in Liberia and several countries in West Africa in the 1980s, or to a higher level of repression in response to civil unrest like in Togo.

### ***Developmental – high level of repression***

The fourth type of state is in many ways paradoxical; power is strongly centralised and all opposition effectively oppressed, but that power is not abused for personal gain in favour of a ruling elite. This is in other words a version of the Leninist ideal of the vanguard party that seizes absolute power in order to transform and develop the society as a whole – and in turn “withers” away into the stateless and classless ideal. While Lenin intended to go for state type 4, he and more notably his successors soon ended up in type 2 (predatory-high level of repression). The Guinean experience throughout the twentieth century underlines the old dictum that “absolute power corrupts absolutely” to the extent that it is hard to envisage that a state over time can avoid that kind of distortion.

### ***Effects of resource endowment: two competing hypotheses***

I underlined above that large natural resources seem to be strongly correlated with economic decay, corruption and repression. In terms of the concepts elaborated above, this can be accounted for in the following manner: Oil revenues – or the prospects of future incomes from petroleum – raise the stakes and the “booty” available to those in power. Once they are in control over the new flow of funds into the treasury, they can use this very resource base to reinforce their grip on the state, which is the most important source of income in the country. In this way, political and economic power merges so that it becomes impossible to distinguish the one from the other.

Control over political institutions is both a result of and a precondition for economic wealth.

Under such circumstances, repression and predation go hand in hand. The former is a prerequisite for the latter and the personal fortunes acquired in the process of predation lays the foundation for perpetuating the repressive apparatus. This tendency is not dependent on natural wealth, but the temptation to combine repression and predation is much stronger, if the revenues are very large and flow very quickly. The higher the revenue from oil, the more the elite has to lose and the more short-sighted it becomes. In short, the oil riches provide the motivation for predatory elite to take power and the means for the preservation of their position. Oil money makes bad government worse.

This line of reasoning follows from the logic developed by Karl (1997). Oil dependent states are distorted in economic and political terms because their basic incomes do not originate from regular taxation of productive activities. They are therefore not dependent on a middle class of taxpayers, or on domestic entrepreneurs. As a consequence, they fail to develop the variety of mechanisms and relations that are needed to regulate taxation in a pluralist state. In the extreme, such states do not need their citizens, neither for funds nor for political support. The fundamental relationship between state and society then becomes limited to handing out money and repressing dissent. The typical petro-state belongs squarely in our type 2, the malign combination of repression and predation. This is the essence of our central hypothesis, which we dubbed the “greedlock” hypothesis.

However, it is at least in theory possible to turn this argument upside down; new revenues can facilitate a gradual change from a predatory to a developmental state by “greasing” the reform process. With a larger cake to share, it is not necessary to take money away from the vested interests. An increase in public funds can thus make it possible for reformist elite to move from predatory to developmental and, simultaneously, lower the level of repression.

While empirical evidence so far suggests that this is unlikely, we do not take the deterministic position that it is impossible. As an alternative to “greedlock,” we have therefore developed a competing hypothesis revolving around the benevolent oil state. In the empirical analysis, we should be on the outlook for indications

of developments that point in the opposite direction from that predicted by the “greedlock” hypothesis. Such indicators could be increases in public expenditure for education and other basic services, political liberalisation (more space for NGOs and independent media, more open elections), judicial reform, arms-length barriers between state regulatory functions and politics (like the role of the national bank, foreign trade regime, the financial sector, etc.), renovation of state bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies.

## Chapter Five

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### Democracy in Africa Today: A Historical Overview

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Democracy is not a Western import. Rather, it is a universal, intrinsically woven principle that offers the conditions for human beings to achieve their maximum potential. Transparency (access to knowledge and information), participation, instruments of dialogue, effective monitoring institutions, bottom-up approaches, and the decentralization of institutional power are key to democracy. It must be stressed that this is the generation of Cameroon youth that has to make sacrifices and create new and meaningful identities with the understanding that there are new, emerging, Cameroon identities.

This book is intended to facilitate precisely the type of intergenerational dialogue that is needed for greater democratic political engagement by youth. The idea of democracy has become so closely identified with elections in Cameroon that we are in danger of forgetting that the modern history of representative elections is a tale of authoritarian manipulations as much as it is a saga of democratic triumphs. Historically, in other words, elections have been an instrument of authoritarian control as well as a means of democratic governance.

Since the early days of the “third wave” of global democratization, it has been clear that transitions from authoritarian rule can lead anywhere. Over the past quarter-century, many have led to the establishment of some form of democracy. But many others have not. They have given birth to new forms of authoritarianism that do not fit into our classic categories of one-party, military, or personal dictatorship. They have produced regimes that hold elections and tolerate some pluralism and interparty competition, but at the same time violate minimal democratic norms so severely and systematically that it makes no sense to classify them as democracies, however qualified. These electoral regimes do not represent limited, deficient, or distorted forms of democracy. They are instances of authoritarian rule. This book on elections without democracy or electoral authoritarianism in Cameroon

enjoins its readers to understand that the time has come to abandon misleading labels and to take their nondemocratic nature seriously.<sup>1</sup>

Democracy is not new to Africa. Dating back to ancient times, there existed some African societies that understood and adhered to the principles of democracy (Online at: [www.africasummit.org](http://www.africasummit.org)). A characteristic of these traditional societies that is most pertinent to the cross-cultural debate on democracy is the autonomous and participatory nature of their decision-making processes. These systems rested on the devolution of power down to the local units – territorial divisions, clans, lineages, and extended families, with the individual as a vital member of the community.

Put in the reverse order, these political systems – which included empires, kingdoms, “republics,” and stateless societies – were structured in a hierarchy in which the basic unit was the family, extended to the lineage, the clan, on to territorially defined entities. In this participatory system of governance, decisions were generally reached by consensus and broad-based consultation through group representation at various levels.

Under these types of systems, extended families in villages chose their heads that together formed a council of elders. Without the council, the chief, and even the king was powerless. In the deliberations of the council any adult could speak, and council members could deliberate for as long as was necessary to arrive at a consensus. As one African author commented, “The moral order was robustly collective....Majority rule, winner-take-all, or other forms of zero-sum games were not acceptable alternatives to consensus decision making.” This process of sharing power at all levels and of respecting the rights of every individual is particularly pronounced in the segmentary lineage system, which emphasizes the devolution of power down to the level of the family and even to the individual. Relations among local groups are seen as a balance of power, maintained through competition in a hierarchy of levels. While relations are competitive at one level, in another situation, the formerly competitive groups come together in mutual alliance against an outside group.

In view of the manner in which the segmentary lineage system functions, it should not be surprising that Somali society, one of the most illustrative of this system, was susceptible to the



manipulation of the clan rivalry by former President Siad Barre. Nor should the assertiveness of the autonomous identity of the clans under Somali warlords, which led to the destruction of the central authority and the collapse of the modern Somali state, be surprising either. The manner in which the Somalis joined ranks to resist foreign intervention (when intervention went beyond relief supplies and took sides in their internal conflicts), demonstrated the way in which “the formerly competitive groups merge in mutual alliance against an outside group.”

In the context of modern Africa, democracy has, of course, acquired a more universalizing meaning. Among the principles of democracy that have gained universal validity are that governments rule in accordance with the will of the people; adherence to the rule of the law, separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary; and have respect for fundamental human rights and civil liberties. These principles are safeguarded by transparency, freedom of expression (and the press), access to information, and accountability to the public. Democracy also implies accommodation of differences and a special responsibility for the protection of minorities.

In Africa, the situation is complicated by the fact that the modern state is primarily a conglomeration of many ethnic groups, which makes it difficult to speak of majority and minority. Given the fact that these countries are still in the process of nation-building, groups that find themselves threatened with a minority status might tend to resist such a stratifying national framework, and might prefer to “exit” if they have the capacity to do so. This poses a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the regime, if not the state itself, calling for a major restructuring of the constitutive system. Even though an electoral system should allow for the protection and participation of minorities in the short run, the goal in the long run must be to transcend these differences and apply democracy on a non-ethnic, non-racial, and non-religious basis – a truly unifying concept of nationhood. All of the populace must come to feel that their citizenship rights are guaranteed and that their rights are equal to those of fellow citizens in other identity groups.

The main point to underscore is that while democracy is universally valued, it needs to be considered in context of African realities and it must make effective use of indigenous values,

institutions, and social mores. However, such consideration must not be allowed to degenerate into a relativistic pretext for authoritarianism, which is itself inimical to most indigenous African political theory and practice. In traditional Africa, most rulers governed with the consent of the people who participated broadly in their own self-administration, were free to express their will, and held their leaders to high standards of transparency and accountability. Certain elements of traditional political theory and practice, in particular popular participation and consensus building, are still worth considering when developing principles of democracy that are appropriate within the African context.

## **Note**

1. For similar recent diagnoses, see Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (January 2002): 5-21; Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 33-34; and Andreas Schedler, "The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections," *International Political Science Review* 23 (January 2002): 103-22. On "diminished subtypes" of democracy, see David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49 (April 1997): 430-51.

## Chapter Six

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### Pluralist Elections and Ideological Complementarity

Electoral authoritarian regimes neither practice democracy nor resort regularly to naked and barbaric repression. By organizing periodic elections they try to obtain at least a semblance of democratic legitimacy, hoping to satisfy external aid donors as well as internal actors. At the same time, by placing those elections under tight authoritarian controls they try to cement their continued hold on power. Their dream is to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty. Balancing between electoral control and electoral credibility, they situate themselves in a nebulous zone of structural ambivalence. Delimiting the blurry frontiers of electoral authoritarianism cannot help but be a complex and controversial task. Perhaps the best way to get a handle on the problem is take a fresh look at the normative presuppositions that underlie the idea of democratic elections.

But what does “democracy” mean in this context? How sharp is the distinction between “democratic” and “authoritarian” regimes? Political democracy, some argue, is not a matter of “either/or” but of more or less: Democracy is not simply present or absent, but admits of degrees. Others object that a qualitative difference separates democracy from authoritarianism. The case of Cameroon—a state whose citizens, while granted the right to vote, have little or no participation in the decision-making process of the government—is instructive here.

Authoritarian regimes are not *less* democratic than democracies, but plainly *undemocratic*. While debate over these issues among scholars and practitioners has been polemical and inconclusive, the idea of electoral authoritarianism combines insights from both perspectives. It introduces gradation while retaining the idea of thresholds.

Today Africa has been saddled with, and rattled by, an ideology called neoliberalism. This neoliberalism has become one of the most pervasive, if not, dangerous ideologies of the 21st century. Its

pervasiveness is evident not only by its unparalleled influence on the global economy, but also by its power to redefine the very nature of politics itself. Free market fundamentalism rather than democratic idealism is now the driving force of economics and politics in most of the world, and it is a market ideology driven not just by profits but by an ability to reproduce itself with such success that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of neoliberal capitalism.

Its political arm is multiparty electoral democracy said to be deliberative or discursive. Deliberative democracy (Nino, 1996) rests on the core notion of citizens and their representatives deliberating about public problems and solutions under conditions that are conducive to reasoned reflection and refined public judgment; a mutual willingness to understand the values, perspectives, and interests of others; and the possibility of reframing their interests and perspectives in light of a joint search for common interests and mutually acceptable solutions.

It is thus often referred to as an open discovery process, rather than ratification of fixed positions, and as potentially transforming interests, rather than simply taking them as given. Unlike much liberal pluralist political theory, deliberative democracy does not assume that citizens have a fixed ordering of preferences when they enter the public sphere. Rather, it assumes that the public sphere can generate opportunities for forming, refining, and revising preferences through discourse that takes multiple perspectives into account and orients itself towards mutual understanding and common action. Deliberative democracy in its predominant usage today means expanding the opportunities of citizens themselves to deliberate. This is meant to respond to several kinds of problems:

### ***Direct Plebiscitary Democracy***

Despite the intentions of the framers of the Constitution, a direct-majoritarian version of democracy has been in the ascendancy in the United States since the nineteenth century, and depletes our capacities for reasoned deliberation. In this version of democracy, those mechanisms that compel decisions to conform directly to existing majority opinion are seen as more democratic than those that filter decisions through representation. The ascendancy of

opinion polls, talk show democracy, referendums, and primaries are manifestations of this. As a result, policy questions become oversimplified and stylized, and our capacity to solve increasingly complex public problems declines.

### ***Interest Group Representation***

The increasing organization of citizens into interest groups has tended to turn politics into a competition of interests narrowly defined. The advocacy explosion of recent years has helped to democratize access to the halls of power, but has also generated a kind of “hyperpluralism” that makes it increasingly difficult to address questions of common purpose and revise programs that may have outlived their usefulness. This hinders our capacity to innovate to solve new problems.

### ***Professional Political Class***

Citizens have become increasingly disengaged and cynical about politics because they see it as an exclusive game for professionals and experts, such as politicians, campaign managers, lobbyists, pollsters, journalists, and talking heads. Technocratic approaches within public administration exacerbate this sense of the displaced citizen.

Deliberative democracy introduces a different kind of citizen voice into public affairs than that associated with raw public opinion, simple voting, narrow advocacy, or protest from the outside. It promises to cultivate a responsible citizen voice capable of appreciating complexity, recognizing the legitimate interests of other groups (including traditional adversaries), generating a sense of common ownership and action, and appreciating the need for difficult trade-offs. And one of the central arguments of deliberative democratic theory is that the process of deliberation itself is a key source of legitimacy, and hence an important resource for responding to our crisis of governance (Polanyi, 1944).

Deliberative democracy can exist in many forms and combinations, and can be complementary to various other mechanisms that ensure democratic representation and efficient administration. Thus, we can see deliberative democratic forms used not only for shaping an independent citizen dialogue, but for

complementing deliberations by a city council, state legislature, or administrative agency. Does this form exist in Africa today? No!

Democracy swells and recedes in West Africa. In recent decades the trend was favourable – military rulers fell. But as in the 1990s and early 2000, democratic rule is now being nibbled away in several countries, among them Mali. The threat today is not from classic military dictatorship, but more subtle forms of autocracy - often endorsed by a public angry at the corruption and ineptitude of its democratic political system. Burkina Faso is a speaking example.

The history of democracy in West Africa is one of advances and setbacks. Autocracy is no solution. Alongside their brutality, the continent's elected strongmen have brought even more theft and mismanagement – which is usually why they have fallen after a non-renewable term of office. Once in office, predatory autocratic presidents can use their parcels of power to grab far more than the usual advantages of incumbency: election rigging, embezzlement, cronyism, nepotism, ethnicism, etc.

## Chapter Seven

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### Neoliberalism, Stagnation and Killing of Democracy

Neoliberalism is not able to provide an institutional framework for sustained global capital accumulation. Neoliberalism undermines and dismantles the institutions set up to stabilize the capitalist economy and alleviate capitalist social contradictions. The capitalist global economy is therefore left exposed to increasingly frequent and violent financial crises. As the editors of *Monthly Review* put it: “Globalization under neoliberal regimes has meant in many ways the globalization of stagnation tendencies and financial crisis.”<sup>2</sup>

Global effective demand is the sum of global private consumption, global private investment, and global government expenditures. Under neoliberalism, global inequality has reached unprecedented levels and working people in many parts of the world have suffered from absolute pauperization. It follows that the purchasing power of the great majority of the world population has fallen or grown more slowly than world output.

Private investment in the face of global overcapacity stagnates, and private capital turns to speculation in financial instruments. As a result of financial liberalization, cross-border speculative capital flows have greatly increased, raising the danger of capital flight and financial crisis. Against such dangers, some central banks are forced to maintain high interest rates, in effect paying a risk premium to global finance capital.

Under neoliberalism, governments have mostly pursued tight fiscal and monetary policies, restraining public spending. With liberalized financial markets, governments that run fiscal deficits are likely to be “punished” by private investors who may respond with capital flight and attacks on the currency. Therefore, governments (especially the governments of peripheral and semiperipheral countries) are under strong pressures to maintain fiscal balance by cutting expenditures. All neoliberal regimes seek to limit government expenditure. To summarize, in the neoliberal era, all three components of global effective demand are subject to strong downward pressures and have tended to either contract or stagnate.

Neoliberalism has stabilized competitive civilian rule by weakening internal challenges to its survival in Africa. By so doing, it has killed democracy in Africa. For example, Burkina Faso's neoliberal President Blaise Compaoré stormed to a third consecutive term of office on Friday, November 18, 2005, with a "landslide victory" in presidential polls. Compaoré, who has ruled the impoverished country since 1987, took 80 percent of the vote. His nearest rival, Benewende Sankara, won just five percent – fewer votes than the number of void ballot papers. There were usual complaints of widespread irregularities such as multiple voting by Compaore militants. Voter turnout was a poor 58 percent, according to official figures.

On several occasions, Burkina Faso or the region's large-scale poverty and tremendous inequalities of income and wealth triggered calls for redistribution and other deep-reaching social reforms. These problems also allowed for the rise of radical populists, who used fiery rhetoric to win backing from masses of discontented citizens, left-wing parties, and trade unions and thereby to advance their political ambitions whenever neoliberal candidates have disgraced the "good governance" creed.

The variegated demands and proposals for profound socioeconomic and political change in cases like Togo led to mobilization and countermobilization. As a result, polarization intensified. All this conflict and turmoil further diminished the capacity of governments to solve problems and maintain economic and political stability. The growing disorder, in turn, frightened established political and economic elites, leading them to ask the military to intervene. In many cases, important groups inside the armed forces felt that social polarization and political conflict threatened the military's own institutional interests. Therefore, they eventually used force to restore order, thereby interrupting, stunting or abolishing democracy.

Examples are not far to seek. The Women in Peacebuilding program (WIPNET) of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) expressed solidarity with the Togolese people, particularly Togolese women, to demonstrate their support and solidarity. WIPNET launched a "peace vigil" on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005, as part of its activities to mark the International Women's Day. Why? The



culture of silence which pervades Togo is a highly gendered culture. In Togo women's issues and women's rights have long been disregarded, cloaked by a brutal Eyadema regime and traditions that do not allow for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights in society. However, this culture of silence is beginning to break as Togolese women are beginning to speak out about issues affecting their lives.

Across most of Africa, wherever neoliberalism has firmly taken hold, it has largely blocked this dynamic by sealing the political defeat of radical populists and socialists and by hindering the emergence of mass movements such as WIPNET and WANEP that socioeconomic and political elites perceive as serious threats. What the enactment of market reform means, essentially – above and beyond all its specific reforms – is that capitalism and the market economy are here to stay. Communism, socialism, and radical populism are dead or greatly weakened wherever the new development model is in place. International economic integration has made challenges to the established economic and social order much less feasible. Even advancing such demands now has a prohibitive cost by scaring away domestic and foreign investors, who have more “exit” options as a result of market reform, especially the easing or elimination of capital controls.

Neoliberalism has also changed the balance of power between domestic socio-economic and political forces. Leading business sectors have gained greater clout; they now have better access to international capital markets; they have stronger links to transnational corporations; they have bought up many public enterprises, often at rock-bottom prices; and therefore they own a greater share of the economy. At the same time, thoroughgoing market reform has weakened the sociopolitical forces that used to support radicalism. As a result of trade liberalization, labour market deregulation, privatization, and the shrinking of the public administration, unions have lost members in most countries, are often internally divided, and have generally reduced their militancy.

Because of the fall of communism and the worldwide victory of capitalism, most of Africa's socialist and Marxist parties are on the defensive. The case of Côte d'Ivoire is living testimony. The Communist Parties of Africa, meeting in Cotonou (Benin), declare

that Côte d'Ivoire has been plunged into a reactionary civil war since September 19, 2002. This is undoubtedly the most serious crisis that the proletariat and peoples of the Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the countries of the sub-region, have faced since formal independence in 1960. Côte d'Ivoire is a French neo-colony that formally achieved independence in 1960. Like many of the countries colonized by France, colonization was replaced by neo-colonization, a new form of imperialist domination. From 1960 to 1990, this French neo-colony was ruled by the State Party, the PDCI-RDA [Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire – African Democratic Rally], led by the late autocrat Houphouët-Boigny.

The crisis of the neo-colonial system that Côte d'Ivoire has been experiencing since 1980, on top of the economic crisis and the heroic struggles of the popular masses for their freedom and bread, led to the weakening of the bases of the autocracy and its only party in 1990. From that partial victory of the popular masses, parties and organisations of the masses were formed. Of those parties, we should point out the ones that represent the middle classes which for a long time were oppressed by the PDCI. Those parties (FPI, PIT, USD, etc.) by their programmes, speeches and practice are competing with the PDCI to serve as lackeys of international imperialism, particularly French imperialism.

After the death of Houphouët-Boigny, the PDCI-RDA, undermined by its internal contradictions, split into two: the RDR of Alassane Ouattara and the PDCI of Konan Bédié. Those two parties of the Houphouët-Boigny type, as well as the petty bourgeois parties are fighting to the death over neo-colonial power, to the extent of endangering the political stability necessary for the security of the interests of their imperialist masters. The bourgeois parties have used various means: the exacerbation of religious differences and the playing off of some nationalities against others, the development of chauvinism and xenophobia, the adoption of anti-democratic measures, savage repression, etc.

This relentless struggle has taken various forms: an active boycott of the elections of 1995, attempts at coups d'état, the coup d'état of 1999. Those confrontations among bourgeois factions are the reflection of the evident failure of French imperialism to reach unity of their lackeys, and this has led to the present war. Thus, the

essential motive of this war is to assure French interests in Côte d'Ivoire and in the sub-region of West Africa.

The deep causes can be summarized as:

The Intervention of French imperialism to impose lackeys who are capable of assuring the necessary political framework for imperialist exploitation and to defend their "plots" in West Africa against the voraciousness of U.S. imperialism;  
The anti-democratic, chauvinist, xenophobic and exclusionary politics of the bourgeois tendencies; the relentless struggles among those bourgeois factions for power; and,  
The intervention of the neo-colonialist forces of Blaise Compaoré (Burkina Faso) and Charles Taylor (Liberia), as junior partners of French imperialism and also on their own account, giving support to the armed factions in the Ivory Coast (military, logistical and political support).

This reactionary war is between the party in power, the FPI and its allies in the 'Patriotic Front', and the rebels (MPCI, MPIGO, MJP) and the RDR. It is the continuation by means of arms of the reactionary politics of the bourgeoisie and its master, French imperialism. It is a reactionary war, because it does not correspond to the interests of the popular masses and their emancipation. It is a war opposed to the aspirations and interests of the popular masses. This reactionary civil war has the following immediate political consequences:

Aggravation of imperialist domination: the agreements of Lina-Marcousis and resolution 1464 of the UN that makes Côte d'Ivoire a protectorate of French imperialism;  
The establishment of a fascist neo-colonial regime in Côte d'Ivoire;  
Danger of an increase in the nationalist, chauvinist and xenophobic currents in the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso.  
The danger of a generalization of the war.

As for the economic and social consequences:

The collapse of the economies of the whole region,

particularly Côte d'Ivoire and neighbouring countries (Burkina, Mali, Niger). A humanitarian catastrophe which is affecting the populations of the region (displacement of populations, a massive flow of refugees, epidemics, famine, etc.). Massive violation of human rights (collective massacres, pogroms, political assassinations...).

Faced with this reactionary war, the communist parties who have signed the present statement:

Denounce the reactionary civil war in Côte d'Ivoire and demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire;  
Denounce international imperialism, particularly French imperialism, and demand the withdrawal of their military bases and other foreign troops;  
Denounce the interference of Blaise Compaoré and Charles Taylor and demand the withdrawal of their mercenaries and an end to their support of the armed rebel factions.

The communist parties of Africa call on the proletariat and peoples of all countries in the region of West Africa to: fight for popular sovereignty, freedom and genuine independence. Fight for Solidarity and harmony among the peoples.

These populist parties link their struggle against the civil war to the revolutionary struggle and the struggle for socialism. They call on the international proletariat and peoples of the world to support the struggles that the proletarians and peoples of the region are carrying out against this reactionary civil war (*Octobre*, 2003: 8). A number of these political parties have given up socialist programs and radical-populist rhetoric, and many have accepted the basic outlines of the market model. Furthermore, several political leaders of the neoliberal era have used populist political tactics not to attack neoliberalism but to promote, enact, and preserve it (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996).

Africa's economic, social, and political elites are therefore much more secure nowadays than they were during the decades preceding the recent neoliberal wave. While this shift in the domestic balance of power precludes any bold equity-enhancing reforms designed to

combat social inequality, it favours the preservation of political democracy. Economic and political elites no longer feel the need to knock at the barracks door. Because the risk of mass mobilization, polarization, and turmoil is relatively low, moreover, the military itself is disinclined to roll out the tanks and impose order. Thus, by putting economic and political elites at greater ease, neoliberalism has substantially lowered internal challenges to democracy in Africa. In fact, neoliberalism seems to have boosted the sustainability of multiparty democracy in Africa, both by exposing the region more to external pressures for maintaining competitive civilian rule and by forestalling internal challenges to its survival.

There is, however, another, darker side to the relationship of neoliberalism and democracy in Africa. At the same time that drastic market reform has furthered the survival of democracy in the region, it seems to have helped erode and limit the quality of democracy. The quality of democracy can be assessed in terms of citizen participation; the accessibility, accountability, and responsiveness of government; and political competitiveness (Schmitter 1983, 888-90).

Ironically, this negative impact is, in many ways, the corollary of the positive repercussions that this essay has stressed so far. First, the external constraints intensified by market reform seem to have limited the exercise of popular sovereignty, one of the basic principles of democracy. Elected governments do not have a great deal of latitude in their economic and social policymaking. Therefore, citizens' choices are effectively restricted and cannot "make much difference" without violating clear demands of economic and political prudence that reflect powerful external constraints. The resulting frustration seems to have contributed to the decline in electoral participation and the growing dissatisfaction with governmental performance in the region.

Second, as neoliberalism has further tilted the internal balance of forces by strengthening elite sectors, it seems to have weakened important organizations of civil and political society, including political parties. Intermediary organizations, which are crucial for stimulating meaningful popular participation and for holding governments accountable, have grown feebler in most countries of the region and have atrophied or collapsed in some nations. As a result, problems such as the betrayal of campaign promises, demagoguery, and corruption seem to have grown.

African democracies face increased external constraints in the neoliberal era. By opening up their economies, these nations have become more exposed to the vicissitudes of international financial markets. They need to attract and retain capital that could, in principle, leave the country easily and quickly. Investors can use these enhanced “exit” options to gain bargaining leverage. In order to win major productive investments, countries – or states inside countries – often engage in competitive bidding. They promise free infrastructure, tax breaks, and a number of other benefits. These subsidies for investors limit the resources available for other programs, such as social improvements. One of the central tasks of democracy is decisionmaking over the budget, but a good part of African budgets is “occupied” by investors. This limits the influence that democratic choice can exert on the country’s priorities.

More important, openness to the world economy constrains the options that African democracies can pursue with the resources they retain (Remmer, 2003, 35-38, 51; and in general, Strange, 1996, chaps. 4-5). For instance, the renationalization or tight regulation of recently privatized firms would scare away domestic and foreign investors and therefore is not feasible. Substantial tax increases designed to finance additional social spending might trigger capital flight. Therefore, such changes are difficult to enact – and even dangerous to consider. For instance, investors would respond with great nervousness – even panic – to the rise of socialist candidates in vote intention polls for the recent presidential election anywhere in the continent. Investors do everything in practically forcing this candidate to offer strong reassurances of toeing the neoliberal line during the campaign (Faust, 2002, 6) and to appoint a rather orthodox economic policy team on taking office.

Thus the external pressures intensified by market reform seem to have effectively limited the policymaking latitude of democratic governments. These effective limitations on governments’ range of policy options emerge from forces that lack democratic representativeness. To put it in stark terms, African governments have two distinct constituencies: the domestic citizenry, voters, and interest groups on the one hand; and foreign and domestic investors with strong transnational links on the other (see, in general, Lindblom, 1977, chaps. 13-16). According to most democratic

theories, the first constituency should be decisive; but in reality, the second constituency has considerable influence as well.

In a number of situations, moreover, these two constituencies pull in different directions. When governmental decisions diverge from “the will of the people,” the quality of democracy is limited. Certainly these regimes are full democracies, as the “popular sovereign,” of course, retains the right to disregard the direct and indirect pressures of investors. But such imprudence would carry considerable costs in the neoliberal era of increasing global market integration. The citizenry can, in principle, exert its full range of democratic rights and, for instance, vote for whatever candidate it pleases, but concentrated control over economic resources often leads to a clear self-restriction.

Thus, as a result of pronounced socioeconomic inequality and of exit options amplified by market reform, “all full citizens” do *not* “have unimpaired opportunities... to have their preferences weighed *equally* in the conduct of the government,” as Robert Dahl stipulates in his famous explication of the ideal type of democracy (1971, 2; emphasis added). Increased constraint on the range of viable political options seems to diminish public trust in and accountability of democratically elected governments and politicians.

For instance, candidates must appeal to their first constituency, the people, to win office. They therefore make promises designed to increase their vote share; for example, by pledging to introduce new social benefits. But after the victorious candidates take office – and before the next election approaches – the citizenry becomes politically less important and the investment community more important. As a result, the new government officials often do not pursue with much zeal the promises they made during the campaign. In the extreme, they execute a drastic policy switch – an experience that has not been uncommon in contemporary Africa, especially during the initiation of neoliberal reform (Stokes, 2001).

Limited government responsiveness seems to breed diminishing political participation. If governments dispose of only a narrow range of options, if citizens’ choices therefore cannot have that much effect, why should the people bother to vote or participate in politics in other ways? Citizens feel betrayed, voters turn more cynical, and the “political class” falls into even deeper disrepute.

Politics itself becomes devalued; and politics is, of course, the lifeblood of democracy. Democracy therefore risks becoming more anemic and less vibrant.

No wonder electoral abstention has increased in many African countries while satisfaction with democracy and trust in democratic institutions has diminished. In sum, neoliberalism seems to have limited the quality of democracy in Africa by tightening external constraints and thus diminishing the range of feasible political options and restricting effective political competitiveness. While the region has long been subject to external economic pressures and structural limitations emerging from “global capitalism,” as the old dependency school (over)emphasized, market reforms have further intensified these pressures and limitations. As a result, the space for democratic citizenship and meaningful participation appears to have narrowed.

The internal effects of neoliberalism also seem to have limited the quality of democracy in Africa. As mentioned above, drastic adjustment and thorough market reform have further tilted the balance of power in society and politics. Specifically, they have helped to weaken many of the established intermediary organizations that, in principle, could give democracy a firm and vibrant infrastructure. The organizational landscape in Africa has become more fragmented and atomized; although it is certainly not the only cause, neoliberalism has contributed significantly to this outcome (Hagopian, 1998; Oxhorn, 1998). While market reform has also had some positive effects by helping to undermine undemocratic parties and associations, on balance it has done more harm than good, at least for the time being.

Trade unions nowadays tend to be more ethnically and ideologically divided, to have fewer effective members, and to command lower political influence than they did before the wave of market reform. This decline in union strength has resulted partly from trade liberalization, the deregulation of the labour market, the dismissal of government employees, and the privatization of public enterprises. These reforms have often increased unemployment and underemployment in the short run and have reduced the legal protection for workers in the long run. At the same time, financial liberalization has fortified employers’ bargaining



position by enhancing their exit options. As a result, unions face greater difficulty in organizing and have less clout (Murillo, 2003: 104-8; Roberts, 2002: 21-23).

Similarly, social movements, which were quite vibrant in the 1980s and which used to advance broader political demands, have often had to concentrate primarily on immediate survival issues. Nowadays, they tend to have less voice on political questions that go beyond their basic needs (Roxborough, 1997: 60-62; Portes and Hoffman, 2003: 76-77). Indeed, the social costs of neoliberalism have induced many movements to accept the handouts that market reformers provided to bolster their popular support. Where these social emergency programs were heavily politicized and used systematically for patronage purposes, they served to co-opt or divide social movements, thereby weakening their capacity for autonomous demand making, especially on general political issues.

Political parties, for their part, have grown weaker in many African countries, and their reputation in the eyes of the citizenry has dropped further. While certainly not solely responsible for this decline, market reform has contributed to it in several ways. As a result of state shrinking and other austerity measures, party organizations, which often used to be sustained through patronage and clientelism, now have fewer resources to distribute and therefore greater difficulty maintaining their membership base.

The external constraints intensified by neoliberalism make it more difficult for parties that win government office to fulfil their electoral promises and deliver on popular expectations for social improvements. Furthermore, conflicts over painful neoliberal reforms have led to tensions and divisions inside parties and thus have exacerbated the fragmentation of party systems. In some countries, such as Burkina Faso and Gambia, they have even contributed to party system collapse.

Of course, not all of these tendencies toward involution have resulted from neoliberalism alone. Party decline, for instance, began before the recent wave of market reforms. In a number of countries, parties lost popular support during the 1990s, when they proved unable to fulfil the high – and frequently excessive – hopes engendered during the transition to democracy. Many Africans had unrealistic expectations about the improvements that the restoration

of democracy would bring. When these hopes were frustrated, parties were assigned the blame.

Furthermore, the very economic crises that neoliberalism was meant to combat contributed greatly to the enfeeblement of Africa's civil societies, especially devastating trade unions and social movements, but also parties. Indeed, it is often difficult to ascertain how much the debt crisis and hyperinflation (the "disease") or structural adjustment and market reform (the "medicine") are to blame. It seems undeniable, however, that the substantial transitional costs of neoliberalism and the tighter external constraints that it imposed contributed significantly to the discrediting of parties and especially the weakening of trade unions and social movements (Kurtz, 2002; Roberts, 2002).

It is also important to remember that the intermediary organizations that existed before the neoliberal wave were not always very democratic; in reality, internal democracy was often conspicuous by its absence. Personalistic leaders or small elite groups used to control many parties and interest groups. Unions, professional associations, and business organizations often had captive audiences through obligatory membership, which made it difficult for the rank and file to hold their leaders accountable. Parties and other organizations, moreover, frequently used patronage and clientelism to get backing. By obtaining support through the distribution of particularistic benefits, leaders gained a fairly free hand to pursue their own goals, with minimal real input from their "bases." Thus, in the decades before the recent advance of market reform, West Africa's civil societies certainly were not perfectly democratic; they were not even consistently civil.

It would have been better for the quality of democracy, however, if these intermediary organizations had been reformed rather than weakened and divided. This argument applies at least in the short and medium run. In the long run, the weakening of the existing, not-so-democratic intermediary organizations could create a clean slate for the formation of new, more democratic parties and interest groups. But several factors – erratic economic growth, fluid, rapidly shifting socioeconomic alignments, and the tremendous political importance of the mass media – make such a rebuilding of strong parties and associations unlikely.

At present, civil society and the party system are too weak in several countries – most glaringly, Togo in the early 2000s – to provide a counterweight to the government. Governments therefore have excessive latitude to deviate from their campaign promises, to give in to the real demands or anticipated pressures of investors, to use their offices for private benefit (for instance, through egregious corruption), and to disregard the demands, needs, and interests of citizens. In several instances, government leaders have used their ample margin of manoeuvre to govern the country as they see fit, rather than being responsive and accountable to the citizenry (see the seminal analyses in O'Donnell 1994, 1998).

That personalistic, populist leadership, which claims an electoral mandate from “the people” but determines the content of this mandate at will, went hand in hand with neoliberal reform in a number of African countries. The most outstanding cases of such neoliberal neopopulism were... All these presidents who adapted populism to the neoliberal age (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996) stressed their personalistic, charismatic leadership and based their governments to a considerable extent on unorganized and therefore fickle mass support. Their connection to “the people” had the character of plebiscitarian acclamation rather than liberal representation.

As a result, these neopopulist leaders used their popular mandate to run roughshod over institutional checks and balances. They sought and often managed to strengthen the powers of the presidency and to weaken the legislatures and the courts (Palermo and Novaro, 1996: 256-66; Cotler and Grompone, 2000: 22-35; Kingstone, 1999: 159-69). They imposed their will through decrees and the threat of plebiscites (Carey and Shugart, 1998). Several of them tried to intimidate or control the media. All of these strong-arm tactics diminished the quality of democracy.

Neoliberal reform provided these neopopulist presidents of the ilk of Jerry Rawlings in Ghana with useful instruments for enhancing their autonomy and power, thereby boosting their leadership. Trade liberalization, privatization, and labour market deregulation weakened trade unions, which used to restrict presidential latitude with their demands and pressures. Trade liberalization also put some powerful business sectors on the defensive, while the sale of public

enterprises allowed presidents to buy support from select groups of big business through favourable privatization deals (Corrales, 1998). The dismissal of public employees enabled neopopulist leaders to eliminate their predecessors' appointees, who might use their bureaucratic power to block neoliberal presidential initiatives. In all these ways, neopopulist leaders used neoliberalism for their own political purposes (Weyland, 1996; Roberts, 1995). Where structural adjustment eventually restored economic stability and reignited growth, and where neopopulist leaders therefore attained lasting political success, as in Benin, neoliberalism indeed strengthened the political predominance of neopopulist leaders (Weyland, 2002, chaps. 6-7). This reinforcement of neopopulism constitutes another way market reform has reduced the quality of democracy in Africa.

With the preceding argument, the discussion comes full circle. It is important to recognize a paradox: while neopopulist leadership has diminished the quality of democracy in Africa, it actually seems to have helped ensure democracy's survival. Remember that many observers during the mid- to late 1980s believed that only a dictator like Nigeria's Babangida could enact neoliberal reform. One significant reason why this prediction proved wrong and why democracies managed to survive the imposition of neoliberal reform was the emergence of neopopulist leaders who realized that they could use neoliberalism to advance their own political goals. This convergence of neopopulism and neoliberalism arose from the deep crises that afflicted many African countries in the late 1980s. Hyperinflation and other dramatic problems made many citizens willing to support painful stabilization and market reform. Neopopulist leaders therefore won political backing by enacting the adjustment plans their predecessors like Buhari had postponed for fear of provoking unrest.

Neopopulists' courage in combating the crisis head-on gave them popular support and proved their charisma, while market reforms ultimately enhanced their power. Thus, the surprising compatibility – even affinity – of neoliberalism and neopopulism is one of the important reasons for the survival of democracy despite neoliberalism. Viewed from this perspective, the reduction in democratic quality produced by neopopulism may have been the price for guaranteeing the survival of democracy during the enactment of neoliberalism.

The positive and negative sides of the mixed record that we have discussed are intrinsically linked. While neoliberalism has intensified the external restrictions on democratic choice and governmental decisionmaking and has thereby diminished the quality of democracy, those very restrictions also expose African countries to diplomatic pressures to maintain democracy. Such constraints limit the effective exercise of popular sovereignty and thereby discourage political participation, but they also preclude highly pernicious options, especially the overthrow of democracy by the military or its abrogation by the people themselves, who may elect and support autocratic populists.

In a similarly paradoxical twist, the further weakening and fragmentation of popular sector organizations, which detracts from the quality of democracy, bolsters the survival of democracy by putting socioeconomic and political elites at ease, which prevents them from resorting to extraconstitutional means to protect their core interests. Popular sector weakness limits democratic representation and governmental accountability, but by foreclosing the danger of radicalism, it forestalls an elite backlash against competitive civilian rule. Altogether, both the external and internal effects of neoliberalism diminish the range of political choice, but precisely in this way, they contribute to the persistence of democracy itself.

The available evidence suggests that neoliberalism has affected African democracy in opposite, even contradictory ways. By exposing the region's countries to greater external pressures and by changing the internal balance of forces so as to preclude threats to domestic elites, market reform has bolstered the survival of electoral democracy. Yet in exactly the same ways, namely by imposing stronger external constraints and by changing the internal balance of forces through a weakening of domestic intermediary organizations, market reform has abridged the quality of democracy. As is so often the case, politics poses real dilemmas and painful trade-offs.



## Chapter Eight

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### Essential Elements of Democracy

Democracy as a form of government always has the following characteristics:

- there is a *demos*, a group which makes political decisions by some form of collective procedure. Non-members of the *demos* do not participate. In modern democracies the *demos* is the nation, and citizenship is usually equivalent to membership;
- there is a *territory* where the decisions apply, and where the *demos* is resident. In modern democracies, the territory is the nation-state, and since this corresponds (in theory) with the homeland of the nation, the *demos* and the reach of the democratic process neatly coincide. Colonies of democracies are not considered democratic in themselves, if they are governed from the colonial motherland: *demos* and territory do not coincide;
- there is a *decision-making procedure*, which is either direct (for instance a referendum) or indirect (for instance election of a parliament);
- the procedure is regarded as *legitimate* by the *demos*, implying that its outcome will be accepted. Political legitimacy is the willingness of the population to accept decisions of the state (government and courts), which go against personal choices or interests. It is especially relevant for democracies, since elections have both winners and losers;
- the procedure is *effective* in the minimal sense that it can be used to change the government, assuming there is sufficient support for that change. Showcase elections, pre-arranged to re-elect the existing regime, are not democratic.
- the *demos* has a long-term *unity* and continuity, from one decision-making round to the next – without secession of the minority;

- in the case of nation-states, the state must be sovereign: democratic elections are pointless if an outside authority can overrule the result.

### ***Artificial Suffrage***

Voting is not in itself a sufficient condition for the existence of democracy. Elections have often been used by authoritarian regimes or dictatorships to give a false sense of democracy. Historical examples include Kenya under Daniel Arab Moi, Egypt under Hosni Mubarak, Cameroon under Paul Biya, etc. or the then USSR under the CPSU before its collapse in 1991, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos.

This can happen in a variety of different ways:

- Restrictions on either suffrage (the power to vote) or citizenship/membership, because of an individual's race, social status, beliefs or lifestyle (including work habits, professions or wealth status) voting which is not truly free and fair (e.g., through intimidation of those voting for particular candidates) falsification of the results by vote collection, assessment or reporting fraud restrictions on the formal, actual amount of power that elected representatives are allowed to hold, like amending the constitution;
- Representatives are not required to represent their constituents; lacking the use of various overriding mechanisms such as voter override (where the majority of a particular constituency reverses a representative's decision) or representative recall (where the majority prematurely terminates the representative's term of service) restrictions on the time periods allowed for voting or pre-voting (proxy voting) inhibit true democracy restrictions on the permissible issues of an election and on the "answers" allowed concerning them the strongest support on a plurality of issues or candidates is incorrectly assumed to represent the majority voice and no additional elections are held (restricting the choices to the most popular options from the previous election) to establish the majority opinion



restrictions on the methods allowed for voting or against changing one's vote the electoral majority (majority of the votes) supersedes the popular majority (majority of the entire population or demos); the rule of the people is really just the rule of the voters and issues of legitimacy arise.



## Chapter Nine

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### Political Legitimacy and Democratic Culture

All forms of government depend on their political legitimacy, that is, their acceptance by the population. Without that, they are little more than a party in a civil war, since their decisions and policies will be resisted, probably by force. Apart from those with anti-statist objections, such as anarchists and libertarians, most people are prepared to accept that governments (as such) are necessary. Failure of political legitimacy in modern states is usually related to separatism and ethnic or religious conflicts, rather than political differences. However, there are historical examples, notably the Spanish Civil War, where the population split along political lines.

In a democracy, a high degree of political legitimacy is necessary, because the electoral process periodically divides the population into “winners” and “losers”. A successful democratic political culture implies that the losing parties and their supporters accept the judgment of the voters, and allow for the peaceful transfer of power - the concept of a “loyal opposition”. Ideally political competitors may disagree, but acknowledge the other side’s legitimate role, and ideally society encourages tolerance and civility in public debate. This form of political legitimacy implies that all sides share common fundamental values. Voters must know that the new government will not introduce policies they find totally abhorrent. Shared values, rather than democracy as such, guarantee that.

Free elections alone are not sufficient for a country to become a true democracy; the culture of the country’s political institutions and civil service must also change. This is an especially difficult cultural shift to achieve in nations where transitions of power have historically taken place through violence. There are various examples (i.e., Revolutionary France, modern Uganda and Iran) of countries that were able to sustain democracy only in limited form until wider cultural changes occurred to allow true majority rule.

To survey the complex and controversial frontier between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism, it seems fruitful to rely on the guiding idea that democratic elections are mechanisms

of social choice under conditions of freedom and equality. To qualify as legitimately democratic, elections must offer an effective choice of political authorities among a community of free and equal citizens. Following Robert Dahl, this democratic ideal requires that all citizens enjoy “unimpaired opportunities” to “formulate” their political preferences, to “signify” them to one another, and to have them “weighed equally” in public decision making.<sup>1</sup> Building upon Dahl, let us delineate seven conditions that must exist if regular elections are to fulfil the promise of effective democratic choice only so long as each of its links remains whole and unbroken.

### ***Empowerment***

Political elections are about citizens wielding power. Voters are not picking beauty-contest winners or answering questions in marketing surveys. Elections exist to accomplish the binding selection of the polity’s “most powerful collective decision makers”.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Free supply***

The idea of a democratic election presupposes the free formation of alternatives. Elections “without choice”<sup>3</sup> do not qualify as democratic, and neither do elections with choice confined to a narrow menu of state-licensed options. The range of available alternatives cannot be something engineered by a manipulative government, but must be determined by active citizens themselves within a framework of fair and universal rules.

### ***Free demand***

Democratic elections presuppose the free formation of voter preferences. Citizens who vote on the basis of induced preferences are no less constrained than those who must choose from a manipulated set of alternatives. Modern democracy assumes that all citizens, regardless of their schooling or social status, have faculties of autonomous decision making which are effectively equal in the decisive political respect. But to use their faculties voters need to know about available choices, which in turn means they need to have access to plural sources of information. Unless parties and candidates enjoy free and fair access to the public space, the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box will be little more than the echo of structurally induced ignorance.

### ***Inclusion***

In the contemporary world, democracy demands universal suffrage. Restrictions of the franchise once commonly applied on the basis of property, education, gender, or ethnicity are not legitimate anymore. The modern *demos* includes all adults save those who fall into special categories such as convicted felons and those afflicted by severe mental illness.

### ***Insulation***

Once citizens have freely formed their preferences, they must be able to express them just as freely. The use of the secret ballot is designed to shield them from undue outside pressures, whether in the form of actual or threatened coercion, bribery, or even just the disapproval of neighbours.

### ***Integrity***

Once citizens have given free expression to their will at the polls, competent and neutral election management must count their votes honestly and weigh them equally. Without bureaucratic integrity and professionalism, the democratic principle of “one person, one vote” remains an empty aspiration.

### ***Irreversibility***

Like elections that begin without choice, elections that end without consequences are not democratic. The winners must be able to assume office, exercise power, and conclude their terms in accordance with constitutional rules. Here, the circle closes. Elections must be “decisive” *ex ante* as well as “irreversible” *ex post*.<sup>6</sup> If they do not invest winners with effective decision-making power, then they are only so much sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Elections may be considered democratic *if and only if* they fulfil each item on this list. The mathematical analogy is multiplication by zero, rather than addition. Partial compliance with democratic norms does not add up to partial democracy. Gross violation of any one condition invalidates the fulfilment of all the others. If the chain of democratic choice is broken anywhere, elections become not less democratic but undemocratic. Situated at a middling level of abstraction and complexity, this way of distinguishing between

democratic and authoritarian elections offers at least two distinct advantages.

First, it narrows the gap between continuous and dichotomous conceptions of democracy. While attentive to nuance and gradation, it also takes into account “qualitative leaps” in the contested border regions that divide democracy and authoritarianism. It encourages close attention to empirical detail while offering a conceptual scheme to order and weight the innumerable checklist items that election observers use to assess electoral processes. Though cognizant of the foggy zone of ambiguity that spans democracy and authoritarianism, it still provides systematic justification for the notion that democratic regimes form “bounded wholes” – coherent configurations of essential attributes.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the idea of a coherent chain of democratic choice opens the way to “contextualized comparisons” of electoral regimes.<sup>6</sup> Authoritarian incumbents may play the electoral-control game by attacking any link in the chain. But whichever approach or approaches they choose, the idea of basic norms linked together into a unified whole by the logic of democratic choice can help to reveal their manoeuvres for what they are.

## Notes

1. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 2.
2. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 7.
3. Guy Hermet, Alain Rouquié, and Juan J. Linz, *Elections Without Choice* (New York: John Wiley, 1978).
4. See also Guillermo A. O'Donnell, “Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36 (Spring 2001): 13; and Adam Przeworski, “Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflicts,” in Jon Elster and Rune Slagstad, eds., *Constitutionalism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61-63.
5. On electoral observers' checklists, see Jørgen Elklit, “Free and Fair Elections,” in Richard Rose, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000), 130-35. On

the idea of democratic regimes as “bounded wholes,” see David Collier and Robert Adcock, “Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices About Concepts,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 557-60 and 562.

6. Richard M. Locke and Kathleen Thelen, “Apples and Oranges Revisited: Contextualized Comparisons and the Study of Comparative Labor Politics,” *Politics and Society* 23 (September 1995): 337-67.





## Chapter Ten

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### Summary and Conclusion

The greatest defect of African multiparty elections is that they address the symptoms of the African predicament rather than its structural causes in terms of explaining the structural roots of the crisis of politics, power, and production. Inefficiency, waste, mismanagement, corruption, hiring of ghost workers, over-generous allowances to political elites and bureaucrats, and in the World Bank's own words, "the appropriation of the machinery of government by the elite to serve their own interests" are manifestations of more structural and historically determined coalitions, contradictions, and crises (World Bank, 1989 and 1992). These conditions are not necessarily natural or spiritually determined. They are the precipitates of particular forms of social relations, political balances, power relations, alignment and realignment of class forces, and the region's location and role in a highly exploitative and very competitive international division of labour.

Without addressing the structural roots of the crisis, the prescription of good governance would simply fail to resolve any of the immediate or longer-term problems of Africa. As well, because the political terrain is so repressive, hostile, uncertain, unstable, and undemocratic; the state, its custodians, and agencies have been unable to contain or mediate the forces of economic, social and political decay and disintegration. Elites loot the treasury because they can get away with it. The dominant classes privatize the state and its resources because civil society is weak and highly fractionalized and factionalized.

Economic policies fail because they largely reflect the narrow interests of the dominant classes and those of foreign capital. The widespread human rights abuses, mindless corruption, waste, and the subversion of the goals of nationhood which have characterized the majority of African social formations since political independence cannot be divorced from inherited structural contradictions and dislocations. It is doubtful if mere insistence on good governance, even the imposition of political conditionalities will resolve these deep-rooted problems.

Let us examine this point by answering a few questions. When foreign aid is denied and countries are isolated until they meet the dictates of the donors and lenders, who actually suffers? To what extent did Western imposed sanctions affect the Nigerian elite during the Abacha era? How much of the sanctions imposed on Libya has affected Ghadaffi and the Libyan bourgeois class? Will the elite crumble under the yoke of sanctions and US naval blockade? The truth of the matter is that cutting foreign aid, redirecting investment and the like do not have much of an impact on the elites; it is the already impoverished masses who suffer the most, and when the elites do yield to such pressures, more often than not, they have already designed ways to accommodate and domesticate Western dictated or imposed political prescriptions. Under such conditions, concessions to civil society become more of a survival strategy, a sort of tactical political manoeuvre. Robert Bates (1990: 33) captures very accurately the survival tactics employed so perfectly by Africa's dictators:

In normal times, the power of government opposition is sufficient to cripple all efforts at political reform. But there is a time when these governments themselves become champions of the rule of law. They do so when they are about to fall. At the time of their political demise, tyrants become converts to civil liberties. On their political deathbeds, they seek an expanded role for due process, restrictions on the use of the police and the judicial system, an independent judiciary, and the rule of law. When they are about to pass from the political scene, they acquire a vested interest in civil liberties. They want legal and political shelters from the lust for revenge on the part of the citizenry they once repressed.

With regard to the impact of the economy on politics, there is no doubt that neoliberal policies have exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, and thus become an important obstacle in the way of progress toward democracy: they have set limits on greater political participation, and have eroded the foundations which could increase citizens' political education and sophistication.

Who can deny that when the majority of a nation's people spend most of their daily efforts merely to survive, their concern for the polis loses relevance? In other words, this is one of the causes that explains people's political disaffection. But the problem of democracy in societies such as ours lies not only in people's lack of

interest in politics, but also in the fact that their daily “struggle to survive” has become a ferocious, violent and desperate one, in which the end justifies the means, whatever they may be.

In this context, recognition of the rights and duties of others, as well as the assumption of one’s own responsibilities toward others and toward society as a whole -in other words, recognition, acceptance and respect for the law- become issues which concern no one in particular and which, worse yet, when put in practice, are seen by the great majority as something out of place, nonsensical. Indeed, the basic requirements for one’s definition as a citizen are rejected and violated by the majority of society; and this, in great measure, is motivated by the struggle for survival demanded and imposed by economic trends, which are increasingly governed by neoliberal logic.

Democracy, understood as a political regime in which the equality of citizens is guaranteed through their growing participation in affairs of the polis, cannot properly take root if that participation does not occur; it also fails if citizens are not formed by building a commitment, on the part of each and every one of society’s members, to recognizing and respecting others, as well as obeying and accepting the laws.

Neoliberalism, which exacerbates socio-economic inequalities, conflicts with the demands of democracy. Over recent years, that contradiction has blossomed with great force in El Salvador. The impoverishment of the majority, as a consequence of neoliberal economic measures, has set formidable limits on the strengthening of political participation and the formation of a body of citizens, which would mean the consolidation of the process of building democracy.

In other regards, the negative impact of neoliberalism on the building of democracy has been only one of the aspects characterizing the Salvadoran historical process since the peace accords were signed. Another aspect which must be studied carefully has to do with the fragility of the political system, which has become manifest in its inability to act as an intermediary between the demands of neoliberal economic logic and the demands of society, especially that part of society made up of those who are hardest hit by structural adjustment policies, tax reforms and the reduction of the state.

If this contradiction we described between neoliberalism and democracy has highlighted the not-always coherent relationship between economics and politics, the second problem expresses not only the tension between the economy and society, but also the weakness of mechanisms of intermediation and conflict-resolution between opposing poles. In other words, we have seen the limits of politics in terms of institutionally channelling social demands and discontent, which are consequences of the socio-economic inequalities exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies.

Thus, over recent years, neoliberalism in Togo has done more than weaken politics by undermining basic conditions for participation and having a negative impact on building a citizen body. Its tendency to increase poverty and constrain mechanisms designed in the past to palliate the effects of structural adjustment policies has provoked social demands and protests to which the political system has been incapable of responding and which have overwhelmed it. Thus, the spectre of non-governability has raised its head, popular mistrust in institutions has grown and trust in politics and politicians has diminished noticeably. There is no doubt that, above and beyond obstacles to political participation which are imposed by the daily urgent need to survive, there is also a lack of interest in politics due to the meagre attractions it and its protagonists can offer. Above and beyond obstacles to building a citizen body, induced by the "struggle for survival," there is also rejection of those who, under cover of the law, have enriched themselves illicitly and have peddled their influence. All this has produced a noticeable stagnation in the consolidation of democracy.

All this has made it obvious how hard it is to reconcile democracy with neoliberalism, despite the theories of writers like Milton Friedman for whom "political freedom came hand in hand with the free market and the development of capitalist institutions." Here it is worth inserting a question posed by Ignacio Rchani in his article, "The divorce between democracy and capitalism" (*Analisis Politico* No. 26, Sept- Dec 1995, p. 48): "How can the neoliberal economy uphold a democratic system when the tendency

## Chapter Eleven

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### Towards Social Democracy in Africa

Social democracy, historically, is a term that has been used by individuals on both the far and moderate left to describe their beliefs, but in recent years the latter have embraced the term almost exclusively (indeed radical left-wing critics often use the term disparagingly). For many adherents, the term “social democracy” is interchangeable with the term “democratic socialism”. By the beginning of the 20th century, workers in many industrial countries had acquired the vote and the right to organize into unions and parties. Many socialists were thus led to believe that the working class, the largest group in modern society, could increasingly direct the STATE towards abolishing POVERTY, inequality and class as well as gender exploitation, i.e., capitalism could be transformed through legislation. What has this got to do with Africa, whose states are basically client collaborators to transnational capital?

During the Davie Lecture, University of Cape Town, May 1997, Noam Chomsky said that freedom without opportunity is a devil’s gift, and the refusal to provide such opportunities is criminal. The fate of the more vulnerable in Africa offers a sharp measure of the distance from here to something that might be called “civilization.” As he spoke, 1000 children were dying from easily preventable disease, and almost twice that many women were dying or suffering serious disability in pregnancy or childbirth for lack of simple remedies and care. UNICEF (1996 and 1997) estimated that to overcome such tragedies, and to ensure universal access to basic social services, would require a quarter of the annual military expenditures of the “developing countries,” about 10 percent of U.S. military spending.

Is there a solution to the crisis within the existing exploitative, oppressive framework? No! What will the post-neoliberal world look like? One possibility is a return to social democratic capitalism. Between 1950 and 1973, with social democratic institutions such as big government, Keynesianism, class compromise, redistribution of income and wealth, and regulation of capital, world capitalism

experienced the great “golden age.” For a quarter of a century, the leading capitalist countries enjoyed rapid economic growth, low unemployment, rising living standards, and social stability. Peripheral and semiperipheral states were able to make some progress in national development through “import-substitution” or “socialist” industrialization. Could a return to social democracy bring about a return of the great golden age?

The inherent contradictions of capitalism did not stop developing under social democratic capitalism. Within certain limits, the social democratic institutions helped to alleviate the class conflicts and maintain a relatively high level of aggregate demand. Under certain historical conditions, these institutions were consistent with high and stable profit rates and facilitated rapid capital accumulation. However, as these institutions existed and operated, they tended to create new conditions that increasingly undermined worldwide accumulation. The changing balance of power between capital and labour, and between the core and the periphery resulted in the worldwide decline of profitability and contributed to the accumulation crisis in the 1960s and the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> It was exactly in response to the crisis of social democratic capitalism that the global ruling elites started to pursue neoliberalism as the “solution” to the crisis.

Suppose the current crisis is to be resolved on a social democratic basis. National regulations of trade and capital flows are reintroduced, labour and financial markets are reregulated, income and wealth are significantly redistributed in egalitarian ways, and the public sector is again to play a significant role in the economy. Will these changes be sufficient to bring about a new golden age? Without changing the fundamental institutions of capitalism, what is to prevent the inherent contradictions of capitalism from developing? What is to prevent the “new” social democratic capitalism from entering into a new accumulation crisis?

The establishment of social democratic capitalism could not take place without at least a partial political victory of the working classes and African peasantry. But if that turns out to be the case, the working classes in different parts of the world will demand not only restoring their historical social and economic rights and consolidating their existing rights, but also greatly expanding these

rights. How can these new social reforms be financed? If they have to be financed by additional taxes on capitalist profits, can the revival of social democracy survive the revival of the working classes' bargaining power? The growth rates of the post-Second World War golden age were an exception to the stagnation that characterizes global capitalism in its monopoly phase. Absent such growth rates, no social democratic capitalism is possible.

There are other problems that a revived social democratic capitalism would not be able to address. Can social democratic capitalism provide the necessary institutional framework for dealing with the global environmental crisis? Environmental investment and regulations increase the overall costs of capitalist production (this is not to be confused with the fact that environmental businesses may create profit opportunities for some individual capitalists). There is the question whether after taking full account of environmental costs, the remaining profits would be sufficient to induce an adequate level of accumulation. But more likely, in a capitalist world economy with nation states, the competition between different capitalist states will prevent them from taking full account of environmental costs. In that case, social democratic capitalism will simply be an "alternative" way towards global ecological catastrophe.

During the twentieth century, human beings twice went through the horrific catastrophes of imperialist wars that arose out of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. The past quarter of a century was another dark age in human history. Under neoliberalism, inequality, oppression, and exploitation have reached new extremes. In the meantime, under capitalism humanity is rapidly approaching a global ecological catastrophe.

Socialism offers the best hope for humanity to avoid global ecological catastrophe and to build harmonious relationships between human beings and our environment. In this respect, the record of state socialism was not favourable. But the record needs to be understood in its historical context. In addition to the bureaucratic, undemocratic nature of state socialist planning, state socialist societies were forced to engage in military and economic competition against hostile capitalist powers. Given the context, they were forced to sacrifice everything in order to "develop the forces of production."

The historical achievements of state socialism should not be under-estimated. The accomplishment of full employment and job security (freedom from the fear of unemployment) for all capable adults, men and women, was of enormous importance. It is well known that state socialist countries had been more successful in meeting people's basic needs (nutrition, health care, education, housing, and pensions) and improving women's conditions than capitalist countries with similar levels of economic development. Soviet, Eastern European, and Cuban socialism had succeeded in meeting virtually all basic social needs, an achievement that most of the advanced capitalist countries cannot claim.

What will be the relevance of socialism for today's struggle against neoliberalism? As the crisis of neoliberalism deepens, in many peripheral and semiperipheral states (such as in Latin America), the situation has developed to the point that without a complete break with international finance capital, the imperialist states, and the international institutions that represent their interests, there are simply no resources left (after paying a significant portion of the national output each year to international finance capital) for even simple reproduction of the society, not to say to address grave social problems.

In this situation, the only sensible solution that is in the interest of the majority of the people is to make a complete break with the existing international capitalist order. The national economy needs to be restructured so that resources are redirected towards production for basic needs rather than organizing the national economy around exports to the core countries, under conditions of unequal exchange, in order to import luxury consumer goods for the privileged elites and the means of production that are used to reproduce the existing pattern of the international division of labour, generating "trade surpluses" to serve debt payments and finance capital flight. But these arrangements will inevitably have conflicts with the interests of the big financial and industrial capitalists. At some point, nationalization of the major means of production and the development of a comprehensive economic plan will have to be pursued for the economic and social transformation to be sustained.



Empowerment and democratization of Africa outside the neoliberal paradigm is the only answer to the African predicament. It is true that “(p)olitical instability discourages support for development. Political conflict destroys the foundations of development. The recent history of Africa has very clearly demonstrated that peace, stability and security are prerequisites for development” (Boutros-Ghali, 1993: 3). In country after country, the privatization of the state, the means of coercion, and public resources; and the lack of democracy and accountability have combined with conditions of dependence, foreign domination, and underdevelopment to negate possibilities for growth and development.

Africa is now caught in a vicious circle: violence and repression negate possibilities for development, and the lack of development makes leaders desperate, makes the economy unattractive to investors, and generates conditions which are conducive to repression and undemocratic behaviours. As well, it will be wrong, as is gradually becoming the norm, to pretend that imperialism is dead or over just because the Cold War has ended. Africa remains a region under the domination of powerful transnational corporations and international lenders who extract huge surpluses which they transfer to the metropolis. Hence, in spite of Africa’s “poverty” and “non-competitiveness” in the global market, it managed to pay out to creditors in 1991 a total of \$26 billion to service its debt (UN *Africa Recovery* 1993). How can African economies generate the resources needed to meet basic needs, sponsor development projects, and cover the required overhead with which to attract foreign investors under the neoliberal dispensation?

Former colonial powers taught Africans exclusionist policies as exemplified by their divide and rule tactics, which they still use today to exploit Africa’s vast economic resources. Where they preached exclusion, Africans must promote inclusion. Where they used religions or ethnicity to divide, Africans must use religion and ethnicity to enhance national unity. Divide and rule tactics provide a useful setting for any African president to manipulate the political process to his advantage. The first of these features may be described as a system of personal rule; the second as the ethnicisation of politics. These act as the context within which Kufuor, by instigating and

exacerbating conflict, could and can control the political process. The argument is made here that, in so far as this continues to be the nature of politics in Ghana, Kufuor or any eventual successor, can choose to use the same means to retain political power virtually at will.

If Africa is to get out of its present quagmire therefore, it must proceed along the path of empowering the people, their organizations, and communities. At present, the electoral democratization of Africa has focused on the power elite, who are the natural enemies of democracy. Although the elite have provided the vast majority of the leaders of the democracy movement, their involvement in democracy movements is mainly a tactical manoeuvre (Ake, 1993). The shameless ease with which so-called pro-democracy and “June 12 activists” in Nigeria abandoned the struggle for democracy to join the conservative military junta of General Sani Abacha in November 1993 supports the opportunistic character of the power elite in Africa.

Even the World Bank admits that political and economic reforms in Africa must seek to “empower ordinary people to take charge of their lives, to make communities more responsible for their development, and to make governments listen to their people. Fostering a more pluralistic institutional structure-including nongovernmental organizations and stronger local government-is a means to these ends” (World Bank 1989, 55). Democracy and good governance in Africa must extend beyond support for periodic elections and encourage increased citizen participation and accountability.

### ***What is Not Socialism***

Democracy conscious Africans have to confront essentially three bogus alternatives to socialism: (1) “The Third Way” promoted by former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, (2) European and Third World Social Democracy and (3) Chinese style “market socialism.”

The “Third Way” proposed by Tony Blair, claims to define a “third way” between public ownership of the means of production and social services and the unregulated liberal market. In fact it combines the worst of both worlds, a large and expensive state bureaucracy at the service of powerful financial institutions and bank and authoritarian legislation violating individual freedoms. In practice Blair’s “Third Way” is a one-way to war, crises and the

deepening of privatization at the expense of consumers, the environment and workers. Blair's regime has been an active junior collaborator to Washington's savage bombing of civilians in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, and conquest and occupation of Afghanistan, Kosova and Macedonia.

The Third Way promoted the de-industrialization of England, the speculative telecommunications bubble and its collapse, precipitating the ongoing recession. Blair's privatization program has undermined the national health program, perpetuated the worst transport and infrastructure system in Western Europe, and put English workers in last place in Europe with regard to social rights. Clearly the "Third Way" is simply a euphemism for authoritarian neo-liberalism and militarism.

The second bogus version of socialism is Social Democracy. Over the past 20 years European and Latin American Social Democratic and populist parties have abandoned their reformist, social welfare programs, in favour of neo-liberal policies, subordination to U.S. imperial hegemony and in Latin America the adoption of IMF structural adjustment programs. In brief the Social Democrats and populists have converted to neo-liberalism, redistributing income to the upper classes and foreign capital. They are no longer reformist working class parties; they are reactionary pro-imperialist neo-liberal parties. The best examples of this conversion are Cardoso's PSDB in Brazil, and the Peronist party in Argentina.

The third example of bogus socialism is the so-called "market socialism" practiced in China. The political reality in China is the subordination of social property to the capitalist market. There is absolutely nothing left to Chinese socialism: the workers have the longest hours, worst pay and least social rights of any workers in Asia. Chinese capitalists and their overseas partners extract the highest profits and illegally send overseas between \$30 to \$40 billion a year – creating the greatest inequalities in Asia. The state socializes the debts of private firms and corrupt state elites rob billions from the public treasury to finance their investments, their overseas accounts and their obscenely luxurious life style. "Market socialism" is an ideology to justify the transition from collective ownership to savage capitalism.

### **What is Socialism Today?**

Against these examples of “bogus socialism”, real socialism today first and foremost involves the socialization of the means of production, the transformation of ownership and control of banks, factories, land, social services, foreign trade and the transfer of power from the capitalists to the direct producers, consumers and environmentalists. Socialism means opposition to all imperialist wars, military interventions and support for the self-determination of nations and national liberation movements.

Under a socialist regime representation and elections would take place in the workplace, the barrios and the cooperatives, leading to a national assembly directly responsible to the worker, peasant and consumer organizations. Socialism will promote comprehensive reforms in family, workplace and social services to facilitate gender equality. Public spending will shift from subsidizing capitalists, and paying the foreign debt to providing free, comprehensive, quality healthcare, education and recreational facilities on a mass scale.

The differences between bogus socialism and true socialism are fundamental and unbridgeable. There is no basis for alliances or “co-habitation”. The social antagonisms between classes are expressed in the conflict between bogus and true socialism. The distinctions are not only intellectual; they are practical.

### **Militant Road to Socialism**

The road to socialism involves a set of practical activities which put socialist militants against the elite practices of the political bosses of bogus socialism. In the struggle for socialism militants engage in several levels of action: (1) direct involvement in everyday struggles in the neighbourhood, workplace and marketplace; (2) they organize mass movements, not political sects, to carry out an integral agrarian reform, the socialization of factories, public ownership of banks and state control over foreign trade; (3) militants organize for political power - they do not spend all their time in international forums, meeting other left-wing tourists who have no social base in their own countries; (4) militants meet to resolve questions of the day, to resolve the problems of the masses and to study the political processes, structures of power and the creation of revolutionary alternatives; (5) they combine mass struggle with creating socialist

forms of organization and assembly style of participation; (6) militants reject leaders who cultivate a “cult of the personality” and who subordinate struggles and popular organizations to their personal power; (7) militants and movements invest time and resources educating leaders and organizers capable of making hard decisions, discussing strategies and tactics in assemblies; (8) leaders always share the same risks as the people they lead - in the front lines of the struggle, not designing strategies from “under the bed”. To inspire resolute action in the mass struggle it is important to “show face”.

History and experience teaches us that direct popular mass action is the only road to fundamental changes in power, property and self-respect. Elections to impotent parliaments have not led to any significant reforms in the last quarter of a century. Popular leaders who start on the left, and are elected to parliament are assimilated into the system and end up talking to the people and working for capital. The case of Lula’s trajectory confirms this analysis. He started leading popular struggles and ended up embracing the neoliberal right in an electoral coalition.

### ***Combating Illusions: Elections, The Parliamentary Road and Reforms***

The open embrace of the neoliberal agenda by African Workers Parties and presidential candidate selection of a right-wing big businessman as vice-presidential partner illustrates the decay of the parliamentary left and its evolution toward the right. Over the last 20 years of parliamentary elections, where the mass media uniformly serve capitalist politicians and big business finances all the electoral campaigns, the great majority of the working class, peasantry, and unemployed have suffered a severe regression in living standards.

Bourgeois electoral campaigns have served as a facade to legitimate the power and decisions of non-elected elites from the IMF, the World Bank and the local functionaries serving the local capitalist and financial ruling predatory kleptocratic class. As a result the elected political leaders pursue regressive politics: concentrating land at the expense of the landless workers and small producers; eroding the democratic rights of the people by ruling by decree and

supporting anti-labour legislation, and imposing macro-economic policy (“neoliberalism”) that destroys the domestic market, undermines national public control and ownership of strategic productive, raw material and financial sectors. In contrast to the failures of electoral politics, the politics of direct action embraced by the socio-political movements in Africa and elsewhere have been successful in realizing significant social and political changes. The Landless Workers Movement in places such as Zimbabwe, South Africa via its land occupation policy has settled thousands of families.

## **Note**

1. On the stagnation tendency of monopoly capitalism and the limits of Keynesian policies, see Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (Monthly Review Press, 1966) and Harry Magdoff and Paul M. Sweezy, *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* (Monthly Review Press, 1987). On the changing balance of power between capital and labour in advanced capitalist countries, worldwide decline of profitability, and accumulation crisis, among others, see Samuel Bowles, David M. Gordon, & Thomas E. Weisskopf, *After the Waste Land* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990) and Philip Armstrong and Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism since 1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

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The celebrations that heralded democratic change in the 1990s in Africa have gradually faded into muffled cries of anger and attendant violence of despair. Almost everywhere on the continent so-called democratic leaders are openly subverting the people's will and disregarding national constitutions. Ordinary people find themselves removed from the centres of power, marginalized and reduced to helpless and hopeless onlookers as political leaders, their friends and families noisily enjoy the spoils of impunity. From Nigeria to Zimbabwe, Kenya to the Ivory Coast and Uganda to Cameroon, the writing is on the wall. The experiment with democracy has blatantly taken a dangerous nosedive. There is a crisis of honest, committed and democratic leadership, in spite of the advancements in education and intellectualism of the populace, and despite the influences of globalization and new understandings of governance.

In this brief volume, Tatah Mentan makes an incisive diagnosis of how the "security forces" brutally crush protests against bids to stay in power through corrupt electoral practices as well as how opposition voices have been hunted down and crushed or intimidated into graveyard silence.

This is a clarion call for Africans to embrace the values of People Power in synch with the dictates of the current global imperatives. There is no place for visionless leadership. Africans need to raise their voices to recapture their freedom.

**Professor Tatah Mentan** has taught Political Science as well as journalism and mass communication in African, American, and Canadian universities. His research interests are in the areas of globalization and security issues, contemporary African politics and the political economy of international relations. Prominent among Tatah Mentan's publications are the following books: *Dilemmas of Weak States: Africa and transnational terrorism in the twenty-first century*, Ashgate, 2004; *Held Together by Pins: Liberal Democracy Under Siege in Africa*, Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2007; *With Neither Guns nor Bullets: Recolonisation of Africa Today*, Global Publishers, New Delhi, India, 2007. Dr Tatah Mentan has authored scores of peer-reviewed articles published in scholarly journals in Africa and abroad.



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